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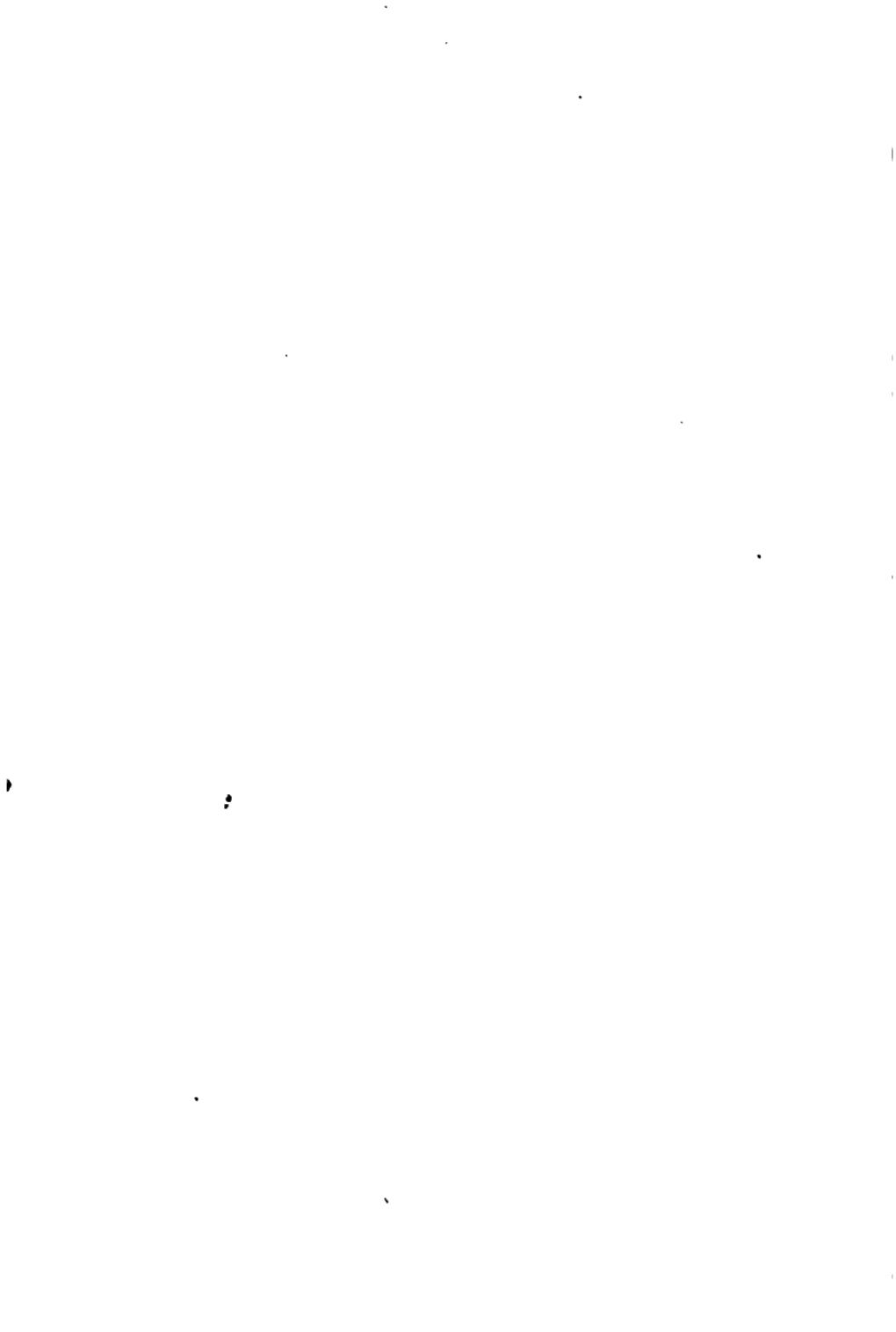
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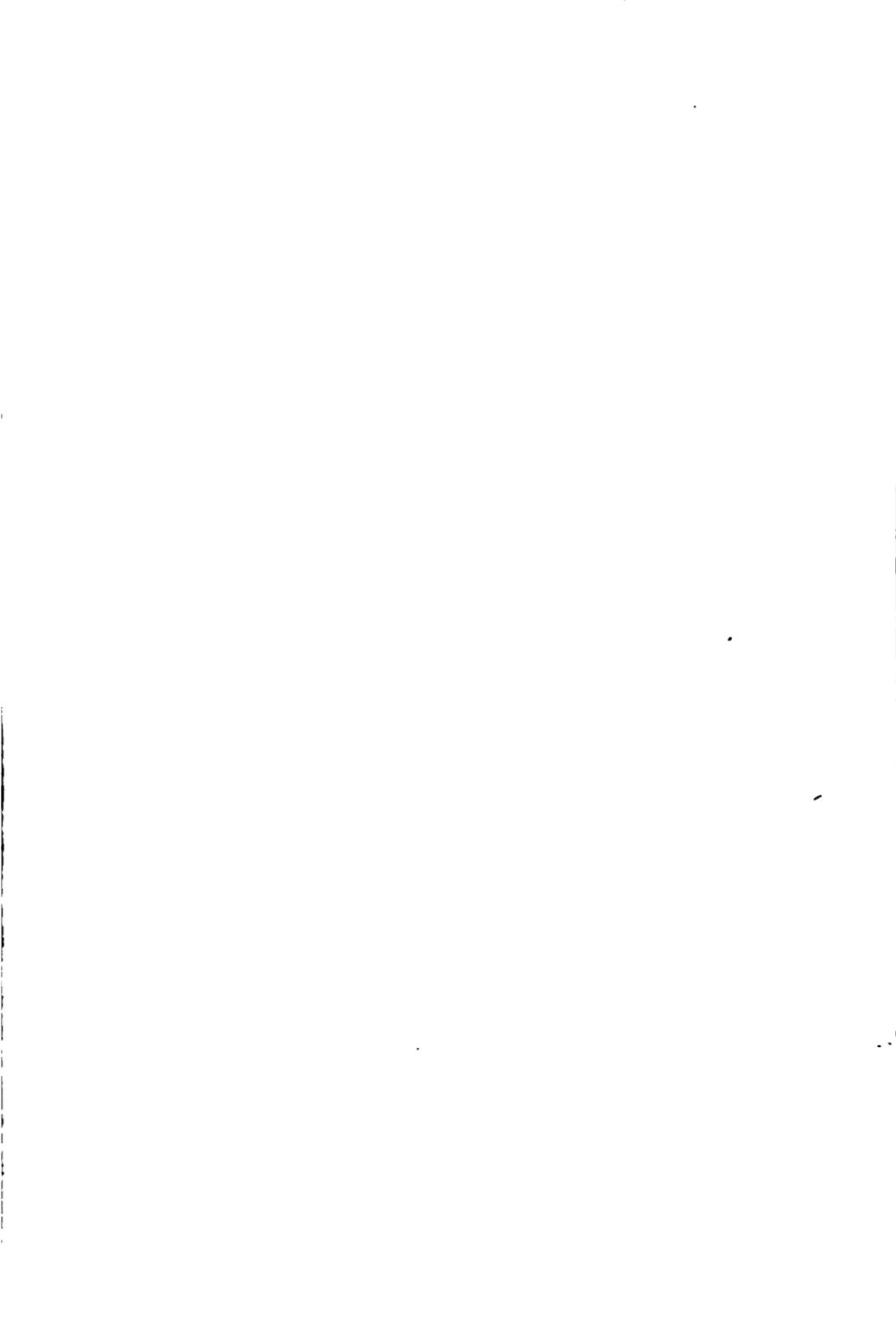
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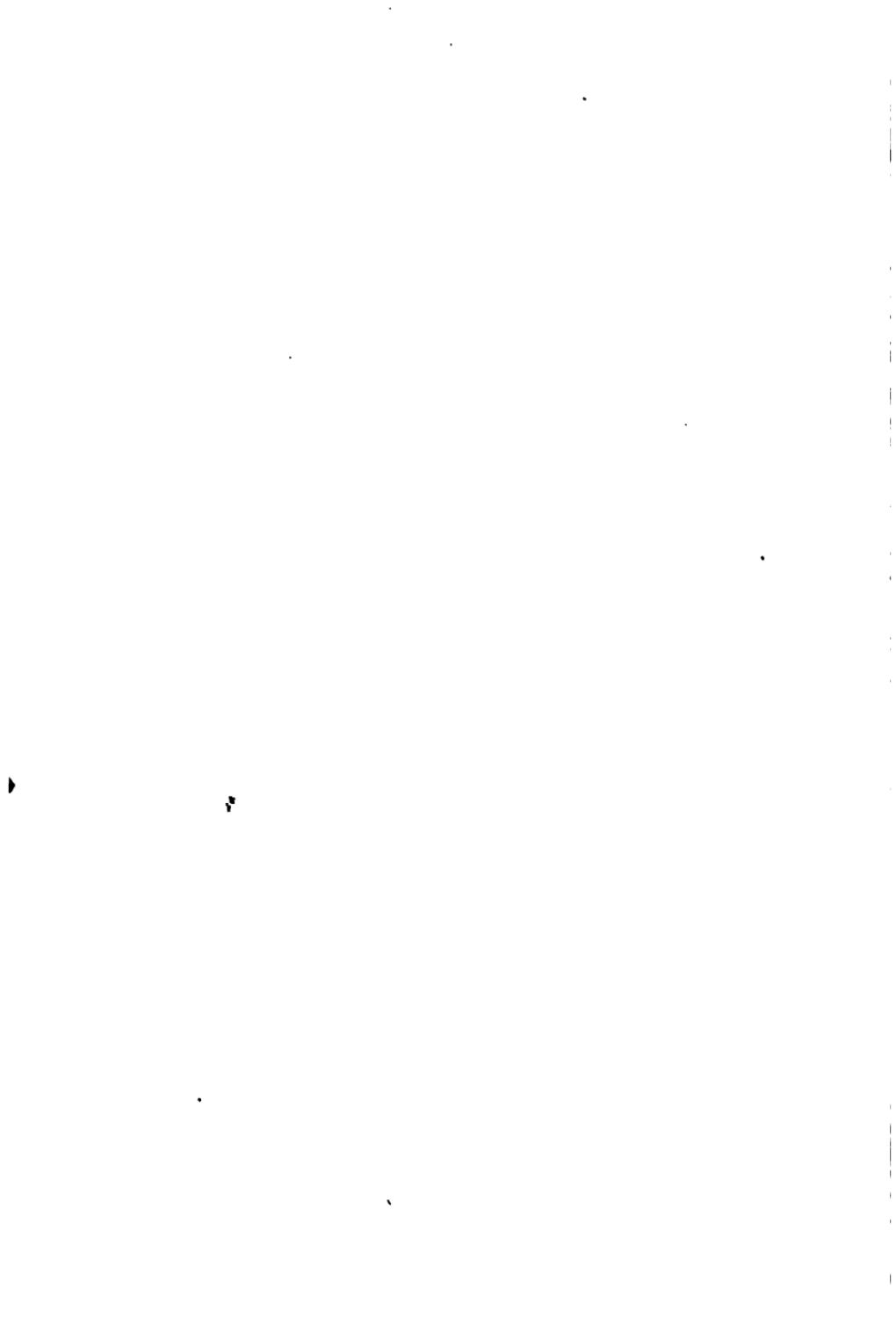


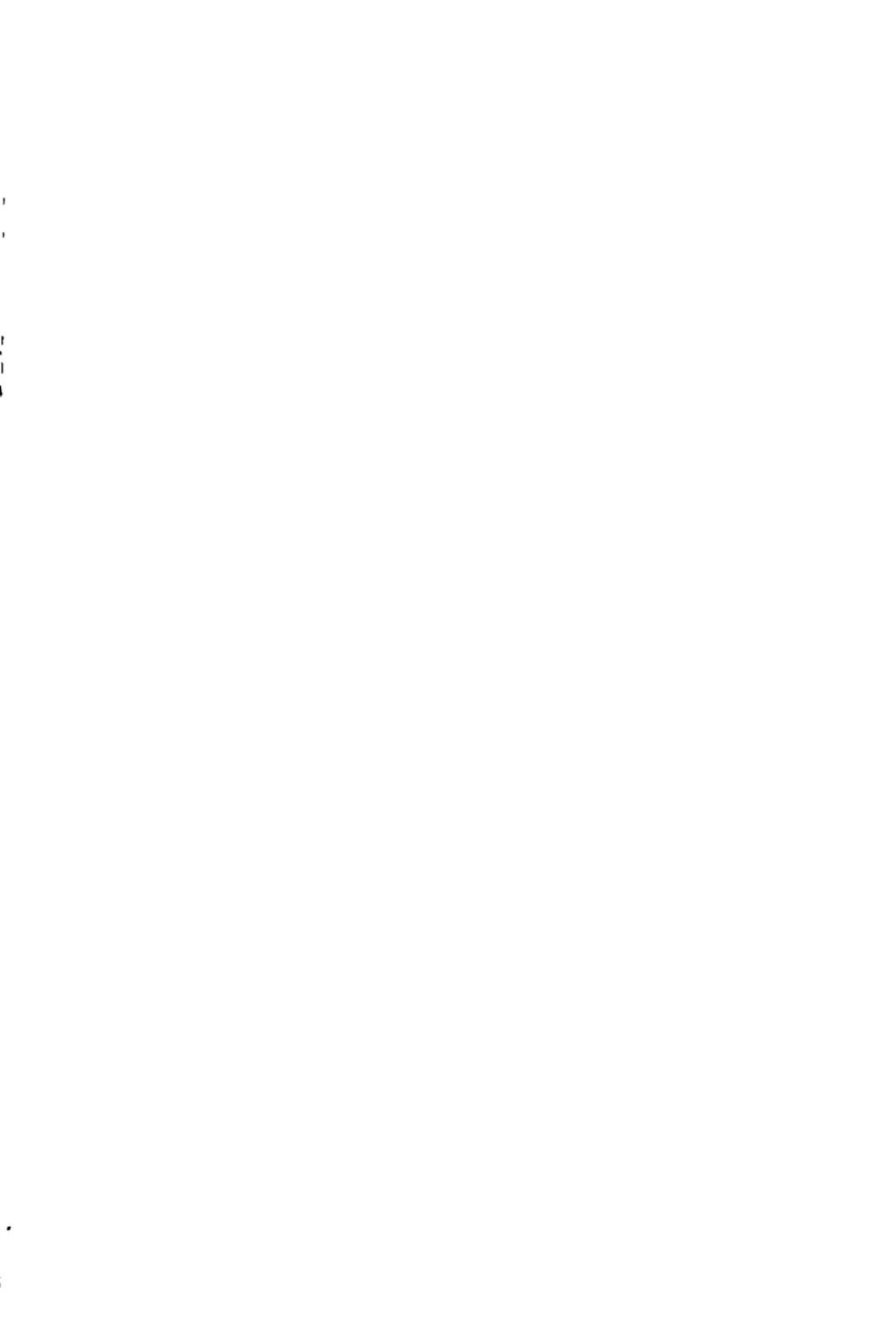


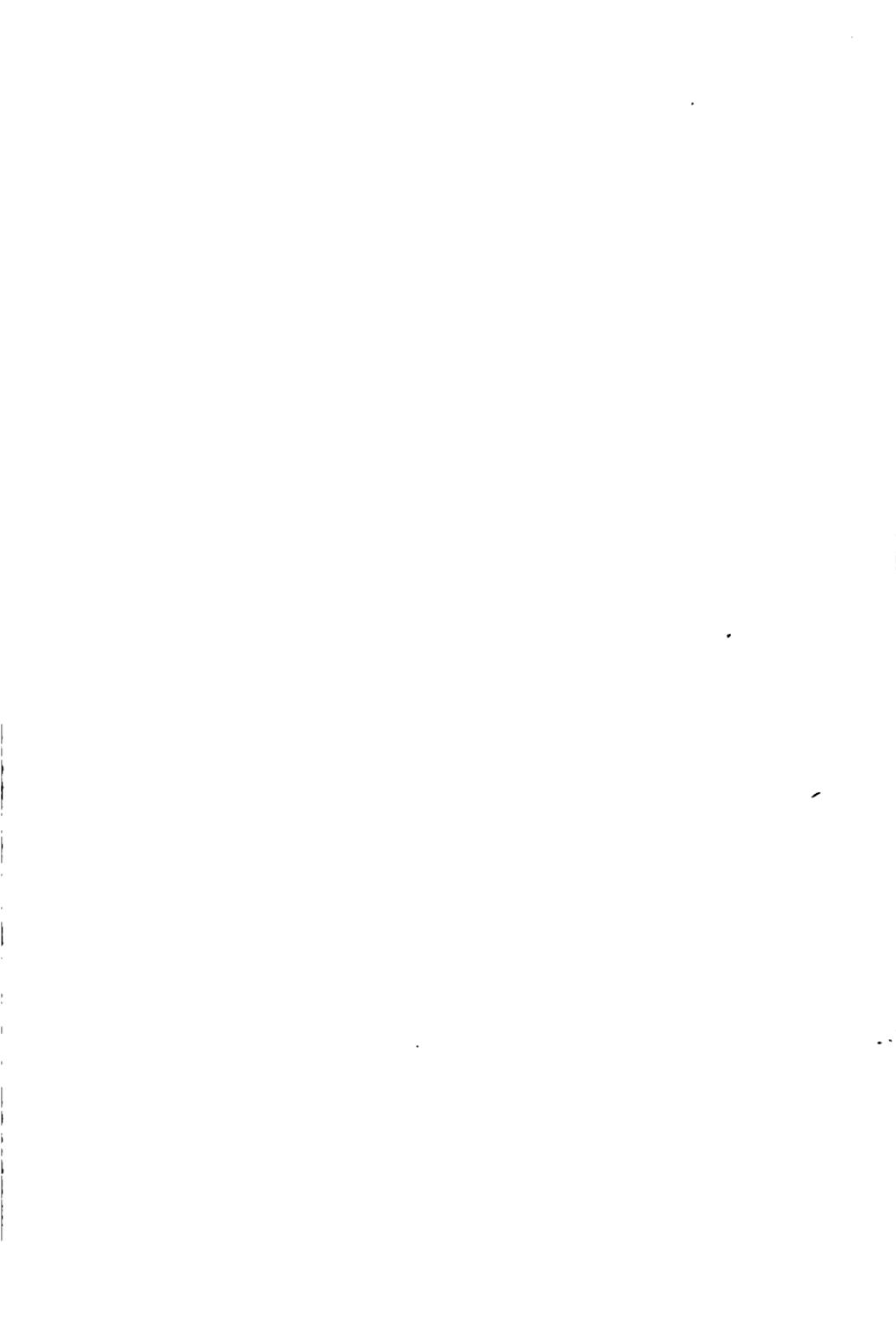
BREAKING-POINT

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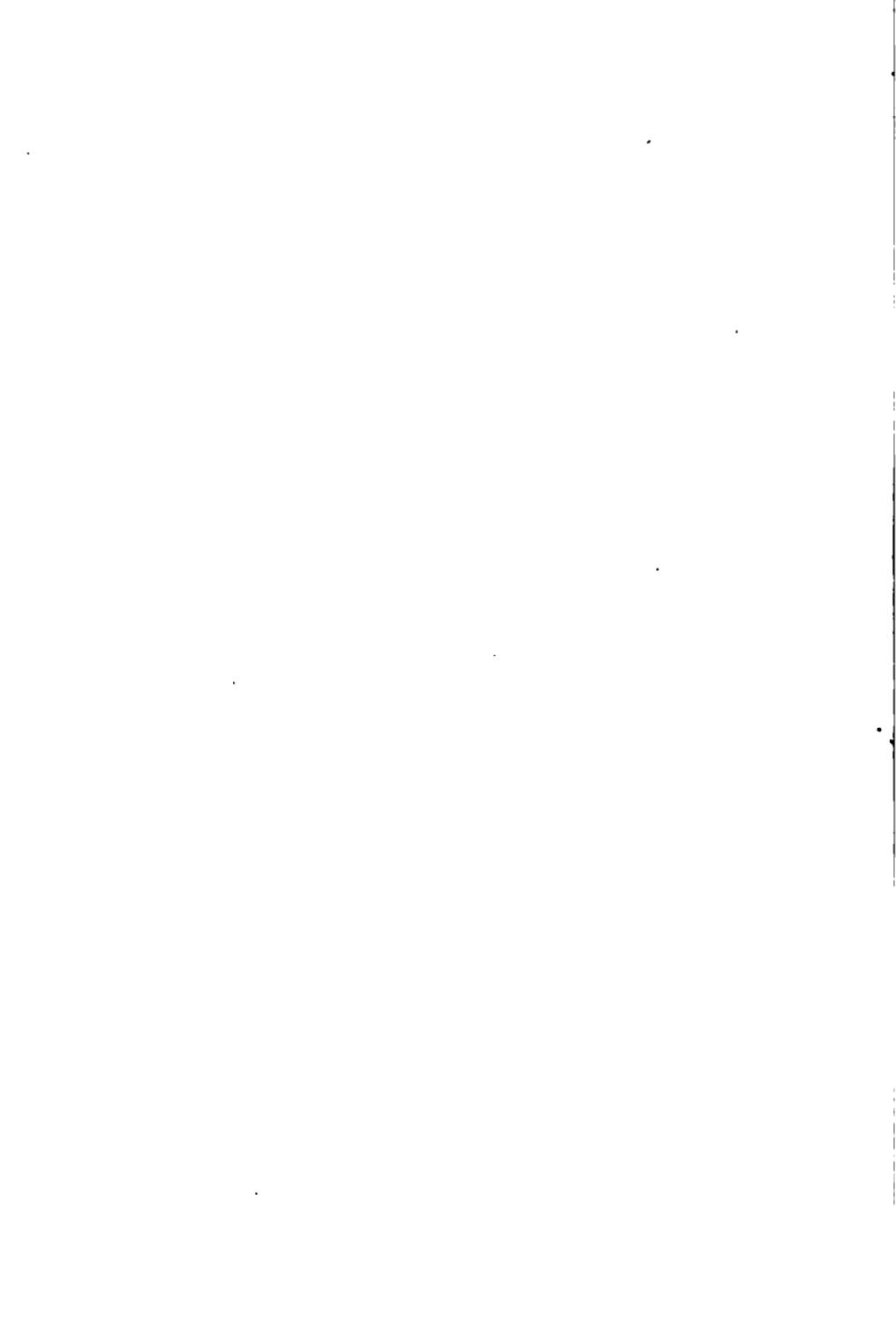








BREAKING-POINT



Art'sybashev, M. P.

BREAKING-POINT
BY MICHAEL ARTZIBASHEF

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CHAPTER I

The little town lay in the Steppes, and beyond its outskirts, beyond the vibrating air of the distant country-side, lay the intangible depths of the horizon of towering forests and the remote indifferent sky. It was easy here to realise the vanity and futility of the handful of human beings who lived, suffered, and died in the place.

In summer the sun burnt ceaselessly down on the Steppes, and in winter they were wrapped in a cold smooth shroud. During the hot nights the clouds collected in masses and the thunder rolled ceremoniously from one end of their vast blackness to the other. But at all times the Steppes were equally oppressive, strange and mysterious. When it was windy columns of dust rose from the plains and blew straight down on the town, like a funeral procession of grey ghosts. Noiselessly they settled on the roofs and windows of the houses, on the stagnant waters of the river, and covered the whole town with a soft unresisting veil. And then the place looked old and decrepit, like the world. Everything was as formless and insignificant as a heap of ashes before the wind scatters them.

It is in such a grey hamlet, rather than among blossoming trees, sun-lit mountain-peaks, the azure of the sky, or in the midst of cities that those terrible thoughts must be born which later enter the world to creep across her face like the pale portentous ghost of death.

A rock flung into the sea vanishes to leave no trace, but a small stone, falling into shallow stagnant water creates its inevitable circles in every direction. And what passed unheeded that day in the midst of life was to stir souls to their depths in that little town.

Naumoff, the new engineer at the factories of Arbusoff the local capitalist, may be said to have caused the whole trouble. Perhaps the shadow which this sinister being had cast upon life was really significant in the speedy development of affairs. But the keen observer cannot fail to see that the

human will is incapable of changing in any minute detail what Life has ordained. Sooner or later it must lead to one inevitable end.

A strange and terrible catastrophe had for long been impending in the uniformity of everyday life, in the busy emptiness of the same interminable routine of existence. Even a few months before everything was going on as usual, and no one imagined that anything could be unfolding which was not to be a mere repetition of yesterday.

The little town was parched by the heat ; ordinary life went on—quiet, dead, dreary ; and a young student, Tchish, hurried from one extra lesson to another, hopeless, embittered and bored. An old white cap with a faded blue border which came down to the ears adorned his pointed head, where his thoughts darted restlessly to and fro. Already he had been stuck for two years in this hole, an exile from the city, with no idea when he would get away again, and he hated it for this reason with the whole force of his being. Somewhere or other, throwing out a million sparks, human lives are being forged, full of the joy of battle, fraught with pain and ecstasy and ravaged by countless storms—but here ! Just as if no one had heard a word spoken aloud, or seen a bright face, since the beginning of the world. As if they slept, as if they were not alive at all, but simply crawling to and fro like a heap of worms lying in the dust by the roadside.

The sun was shining over the town and the air, trembling with the heat, shimmered hazily along the enclosures like a crape veil. The wretched skeletons of the acacias on the deserted boulevard hung their gnarled branches helplessly and below them, scarcely moving, lay their poor dried-up shadows.

Nearly all the windows were hermetically sealed against the sun, and one felt that the inhabitants were suffocating in heat and boredom, limp, perspiring, without thought, without feeling. It seemed like a place of the dead ; not even the sparrows chirped.

Tchish hurried perspiring across the boulevard, and swore. “ Was it necessary to build the town on such an accursed spot ? Couldn’t they have found another corner ? . . . Who dragged them into this damnable wilderness ?

Aren't there enough woods and rivers in the world ? But this sort of thing . . . it makes one sick—these miserable fools ! " He choked with rage, and the worst of it was that his rage was pointless. He understood as well as anyone the complicated web of fatality that enmeshes people even in such remote places.

If he had been asked, he would probably have answered unthinkingly that that was not the most important thing, and that one could live anywhere. But something oppressed him, crept between him and the sun, disclosed a grey cavity in the place of the future, and awoke in him an incessant nervous excitement which envenomed all his surroundings.

Some one with a military cap came towards him from the other end of the boulevard. It was so empty and lifeless all around that a living face struck one as absolutely unpleasant in the middle of this broad, uncared-for market-place, with its immovable, brick-red booths and the white, sun-baked church, with great padlocks on its heavy iron doors, looking as if they were shut for all eternity. In spite of his short sight Tchish recognized Ryskoff, an accountant's clerk. He was sauntering along carelessly, not to say frivolously, swinging his walking-stick, his small colourless eyes looking straight ahead of him and slightly raised. Tchish, who was about the same height, looked involuntarily up at his long, sallow face and prominent teeth, barely lifted his cap and went on. Swinging his stick as before Ryskoff walked in one direction, while Tchish began to hurry away in the opposite one.

They had nothing to say to one another. If the young student had studied Ryskoff's face, he would probably have been surprised at his expression : the clerk's small, blood-shot eyes were fixed in strained, hard thought. The regular movement of his long legs and the immobility of his somewhat drawn face were absolutely lifeless, as clumsy and automatic as those of a machine. He gave the impression of being wound up to go on for ever, till some fortuitous destiny should bring him to a standstill and throw him into a corner, like some silly toy, of no more use to anybody.

Tchish was already tired of everything in this confounded

hole. It seemed to him that nothing but the most peaceful insipidity of everyday life could exist here. That especially was why he sincerely despised Ryskoff, as he despised everyone who moved outside the circle of his convictions. The clerk's face had only awakened in him a fresh wave of bored rage.

"Now, look at that—alive too" . . . thought Tchish, mechanically annoyed, as he wiped the sweat from his pale forehead. "And I daresay he thinks he's doing something grand. Writing a lot of nonsense all day long, perspiring among swarms of flies—bowing down to his superior, cringing to the head book-keeper, and then . . . running about with women on the boulevard. In the end he makes one of them happy, and brings half a dozen new accountants' clerks into the world and perhaps even a head book-keeper. . . . But what the deuce does he want with this head book-keeper? And why doesn't he hang himself, confound him? . . ."

Tchish thought he could not have stood such a life for three days. And his bitter thoughts raced on, so that he could hardly follow them. "If there were only something. . . . Revolutions, earthquakes. . . . Yes, if there were only an earthquake somewhere! That's it—a catastrophe! Not a catastrophe, a blessing! The houses no longer stand, they collapse, the earth shakes, women run about naked . . . everyone forgets who he is and what he is here for. . . . At least one gets a chance of self-sacrifice, as well as of robbery and violence . . . that's fun . . . I should rejoice in an earthquake! A catastrophe! Isn't it a catastrophe, when millions of living beings get into this state of corruption . . . ?"

Tchish spat disgustedly and suddenly stood still.

"Too early yet for the shop-girls. . . . I think I'll go up to Davidenko."

Still uncertain whether it was worth while to go on, Tchish turned mechanically down a side street, opened a little gate and went into a large courtyard, in which there was a plentiful crop of dusty grass. Yet he felt bored at once, as if he had been twice as cheerful before. He even began to turn back, but he did the same thing every day, and as usual he only waved his hand sadly and, much

against his will, went along the footpath trodden in the grass towards a wing, painted pale blue, which stretched along the side of the courtyard.

Somewhere in a granary a dog was barking, but it did not crawl out into the heat. Three hens and a cock were crouching in the shadow with ruffled feathers. Dusty trees in the garden were visible above the wing of the house.

Tchish entered the dark hall, groped for the latch and, without knocking, went into a large room, cool and quiet as a cellar. The first objects which struck him were two un-made beds with soiled pillows, several beer-bottles on the window-sill, cigar-stumps, torn books and the dirty scraps which lay patiently under the broom that had been thrown down in the middle of the room.

Two students were sitting at a small table silently concentrated on a game of chess. Their shaggy heads were deeply bent, and their broad young shoulders had given way to weariness and long sitting, and drooped listlessly.

"There you are again, confound you," said Tchish jokingly, but really enraged, putting his stick in the corner. "Aren't you sick of it yet?"

The two chess-players raised their heads, shook hands without speaking and looked down again at the figures.

"Damn this heat! Is there any beer?" Tchish took his cap off and wiped his forehead, which was drawn with fatigue. His damp hair stuck together and stood on end, like the crest of his namesake the siskin.¹ One of the players stuck his finger silently in the neck of a bottle standing on the window-sill, moving a chessman at the same time.

"Fine," remarked the other lazily in the throaty dialect of Little Russia.

Tchish poured himself out a glass of beer which nearly overflowed, and took a long pull of the cold delicious drink. He gurgled with pleasure. "Good!" He wiped his wet moustache. "Davidenko, did you get the newspapers?"

"Hm," answered the handsome student, without looking up. His faded cotton shirt fitted his broad shoulders like a glove. They did not look like human shoulders, but like the powerful muscles of a bronze statue.

"Mishka, where are the newspapers?" Tchish, who

¹ Tchish, Russian for siskin.

was bored and wished to talk, would not leave them alone.

The lean Mishka threw back his fair, well-shaped head, looked up at the ceiling with pensive, rather sad eyes, and answered : "Under the bed."

Tchish spat, crawled ostentatiously under the bed, freed the newspapers from sweepings and cigar stumps, sat down by the window and began to read. Absolute stillness reigned, and that remote, stirring life of which the newspapers told, seemed very far distant from this dreary, dirty room. The green shadows of branches glided every now and then across the ceiling. Tchish crackled the newspapers ; Mishka and Davidenko gazed silently at the chess-board. The small carved figures had a strange, uncanny look, like and yet unlike mysterious little creatures, who lead their own serious lives, involved in spite of their restrictions. Tchish read on, absorbed ; skilfully, from long practice, he turned the large sheets. Every now and then he poured out some beer, drank it slowly, dipped his moustache carelessly in the froth and then buried himself in the newspaper again.

The terse lines of print brought before him vividly the half-forgotten gay and careless life of the world beyond, utterly remote from the little town. As he read he seemed to see them all : the journalists writing, the peasants starving, the members of parliament arguing, the hangmen executing justice, and emperors greeting one another with ceremony and dignity at the opera.

The protracted game of chess seemed to be infinitely prolonged. It was one of those in which the victory passes from one side to the other, and hints at a constant remise, obscure but inevitable, however desperate may be the position of one or other player.

Tchish did not see this hopeless grey ending. He believed that only the life of yesterday and to-day, and perhaps of to-morrow also, presented such a chaotic, aimless outlook. After that a mighty wave would come, sweeping away all that was old and dirty and bringing with it a harmonious, mathematically regulated happiness, in which he, the young exiled student, that paltry mortal creature, should also have his share, his value and his duty. All that was happen-

ing at the moment, everything the papers were discussing so excitedly, made him nervous and angry.

" Davidenko, have you read this ? In Samara " . . . he began, loudly and excitedly.

" Damn . . . another blunder," said Mishka irritably, fidgeting on his chair and running his fingers through his tousled fair hair.

" Don't bungle, then, you're not playing draughts," said Davidenko. Tchish looked at them, vexed and reproachful, shrugged his shoulders contemptuously and poured out some beer.

" How can I get you here ? " said Mishka thoughtfully, a dreamy look in his eyes. He thought for a moment, scratching behind his ears, moved one of the pieces and said very irresolutely, " Check."

Tchish sighed. All at once the execution of seven people in Samara seemed unimportant. They took on the forms of Ryskoff, Mishka or Davidenko. Crushed and bored they looked, and almost unconsciously the thought flashed through his mind that it would not have been much of a loss if they had been hanged too.

The young student yawned, folded up the newspaper and stood up.

" Well, I'm off " . . . he said, without addressing any one in particular, and took his stick from the corner. The players did not even raise their heads. Bluish smoke, like clouds of funeral incense, curled above them. Green shadows hurried across the ceiling, tonelessly, as if bewitched.

Tchish went back through the overgrown courtyard, heard again the dog's tired barking, looked at the one cock and the three hens under the fence and wondered mechanically, as he went out into the street again, whether they were perspiring too. For some reason this question seized his mind, and he took the trouble to think it over for quite a long time. In imagination he consulted many books, called logic and fantasy to his aid, and not till he had arrived at the conclusion that hens must perspire, but that the thing was a positive absurdity, did he come to himself again and, spitting furiously, walked quickly out of the side street.

CHAPTER II

THE heat really seemed to be growing more intense. The air quivered and burnt in glittering fires. The whole earth seemed to be crouching, afraid to stir, beneath the sun's terrible wrath.

Before Tchish was out of the alley the sticky sweat poured from his brow, fell on his eyelids and rolled in acrid streams to his lips and drooping moustache. He could no longer see, and heavy hammers were beating in his temples. He became desperate.

"Shall I stop somewhere for a bit?" And he decided to go to the club.

The white two-storied club-house was empty and cool. Through the open door of the library books in regular rows could be seen along the wall, looking as if they were of no use to anybody. The green tables, opened out ready for play, stood in the card-room. It was as quiet as a church and only the clatter of plates was heard from the bar. Tchish hung his cap on the stand, which only bore Dr. Arnoldi's well-known hat, and went through the saloon past the thin-legged card-tables to the dining-room.

Dr. Arnoldi was sitting there. A decanter of vodka stood before him, and his huge body, choking with heat and clad in a wide jacket of unbleached silk quite soaked under the arms, was busy swallowing some greasy dish, over which was poured sour cream and liquid horse-radish. The knotted ends of his table-napkin stood up round his neck like boars' ears.

"How do you do, Doctor?" said Tchish.

Dr. Arnoldi coughed, stretched out his hand, which felt as fat and soft as a bishop's, and asked with a wink, "Vodka?"

"What? Vodka in this heat?" Tchish refused ill-humouredly.

"One glass?" croaked the doctor.

"No!" and Tchish, his face expressing decided re-

pugnance, took a chair and sat down opposite to the doctor.

The wide courtyard of a fire-station could be seen through the open window, and the vapours of decaying manure and stale hay rose from it. Some water-carts, their shafts stretching helplessly upwards, stood under a long shed, and even they seemed to be shrivelling up in the heat. The copper alarm-bell blazed on its pole, its long rope hanging down like an outstretched tongue.

"It's hot," said Tchish.

"Yes, warm," gasped the doctor, and tapped his plate.

A drowsy waiter, as tousled as if he had just been dragged along by his hair, reeled down from the bar, but remembering on the way what had been ordered, turned back to the serving-table and busied himself by pouring sour cream over a fresh portion of sucking-pig.

"Tell me, Doctor," Tchish began, in a bored and unmistakably quarrelsome tone, "aren't you sick to death yet of this damned hole? . . . Really, you must have been here ten years."

"Seventeen," corrected the doctor, putting a leg of the sucking-pig on to his plate and pouring plenty of sour cream over it.

Tchish turned away dejectedly. Although he was not hungry, his mouth watered; he looked out at the courtyard of the fire-station, then at the doctor, stifling in his own fat, and became thoughtful. Boundless misery overwhelmed him.

Dr. Arnoldi filled the small glass with vodka and, closing one eye, looked through it at the light for some time, after which he remarked inexplicably, "There's no way out."

"How do you mean—nowhere?" snapped Tchish. "One can go to Siberia from here even. . . ."

"No, it's still worse in Siberia," replied Dr. Arnoldi indifferently. Tchish became embarrassed.

"Well, not to Siberia, of course . . . but, look here, you have means and no ties. Why don't you go abroad?"

"What should I see there?" asked Dr. Arnoldi, and he wiped his lips with his napkin. He was clean-shaven, like an old actor.

" What ? Why, you've seen nothing ! "

" I've seen everything," the doctor grunted lazily.

" For instance ? "

" Yes, everything there is . . . well, people, theatres, museums . . . railways . . . I've seen everything."

" I hope you're not going to tell me you've been all over the world," said Tchish bitterly.

" Possibly," answered the doctor calmly.

" That would be worth hearing," Tchish cried in open astonishment. He looked inquisitively at the doctor and laughed.

Dr. Arnoldi pushed his plate away, carefully folded up his table-napkin and made a gesture like a masonic sign in the direction of the bar. Apparently all the doctor's signals were understood here, for the waiter at once brought a bottle of beer.

" Will you have some ? " asked the doctor.

" I should like to."

The doctor filled two glasses, and while he was pouring it out they both watched attentively as the ice-cold, delicious liquid foamed up in golden sparks in the damp glass.

" So you've seen the whole world ? " Tchish enjoyed asking more questions. He felt a wish to make fun of the doctor.

" You see," answered Dr. Arnoldi, his clever, small, lack-lustre eyes gazing intently, " I've certainly not inspected the whole world—that takes too much time and trouble—but I have an idea of it, and that's enough for me."

" No, that's certainly not enough," replied Tchish conceitedly, with a feeling of superiority. " It's not a question of the general idea, but of the details, of the endless variety of forms. . . . Don't you understand that ? "

" I understand everything," said Dr. Arnoldi indifferently. " Only there is much more variety in my imagination."

" In what way ? "

" Well—it's simple enough. For instance, the sea is always blue or green, but I can imagine it all the colours of the rainbow. They say that Mount Everest is miles high, but I can imagine a mountain a hundred times higher. In fairy-tales there still are palaces of crystal, rivers of milk, mountains of diamonds and who knows what besides."

"Fairy-tales ! Have other people, other customs, other types no attraction for you ? "

"No." The fat doctor made a sign of dissent with his hand. "What customs ? There a policeman, here a constable, there a policeman. . . . Constitution, republic, but no happiness. They suck blood everywhere in their own way. The struggle for existence . . . always the same story, and it's just as bad everywhere and just as dull in its way, and . . . well . . . altogether boring."

"And are people all the same to you ? "

"What else ? Everyone is mortal, that's sure enough. . . . Everyone is dissatisfied with what is, and will never be content . . . and what does it matter to me if one speaks French and the other Russian, one wears a top-hat and the other wooden shoes ? "

Tchish looked resentfully at the fat doctor ; on his pointed bird-like face was an expression of contemptuous pity for this apathetic person.

"Well, all right," he said, in a tone that implied condescension on his part in continuing the conversation, "but what about culture ? Do you know people have begun to fly ? "

"Flying, are they ? "

"Yes," cried Tchish, as pleased with himself as if the results of the science of aircraft depended on him.

"Well, let them fly. They won't get far one way or the other."

Dr. Arnoldi made this remark in such a hopelessly bored tone that Tchish no longer felt any wish to continue the conversation.

He could not understand the doctor's point of view at all, nor did he believe in his sincerity.

"Another victim of Russian laziness, our besetting sin," he thought, disgusted.

To the young student life was an intoxication, and Nature an inexhaustible treasure-house of beauty. As the poor man, whose only idea of a castle is the shabby house of a reduced nobleman, believes that the world can offer nothing more beautiful, so Tchish exalted the earth to the zenith of all splendour. His thoughts were chained to earth, they could not rise to the crystal coldness of the heights, to

the millions of twinkling stars, the immobility of timelessness.

Human life, sad and sordid as it was, offered him so many colours, so many forms of passion, of strife, and of creation, that his brain whirled when he thought of them. The ecstatic, almost morbid emotion, hardly comprehended by himself, which took possession of him when one philosopher contradicted the other, when the Government took a step backwards or forwards, when a new solvent appeared in art, when one form of life took the place of another—all to drift back in an endless procession into the mists of the past—this, for him, was Truth.

He was convinced that if he could live amongst stone buildings, near railways, and in the bustling throng of men, there would be no corner in his life that should not be filled with experiences of a higher order or deeds of revolutionary significance for the benefit of the human race. But now his life was aimless and stupid—it was not the fault of life that it passed him by as the mist passed over the Steppes, but the fault of the little town, the policemen, and the fat doctor.

Tchish looked closely at the latter, gulping down his cold beer, as if he saw him for the first time. "All the same," he thought, "they say he has been ten years in exile, and that he went through some terrible domestic tragedy. What has become of all that? Now he is fat, eats too much, drinks beer, and goes to sleep while he walks. I wonder if he thinks, or whether there is nothing but a drowsy murmur in his brain. . . . Is it possible that a few years in this provincial bog can ruin one to such an extent?"

Tchish was depressed. It occurred to him that there were times when he found everything uninteresting, and days when he could neither think nor read, when he ran from one lesson to the other, caring for nothing, his one idea to be free as soon as possible, that he might lie down and sleep.

"I'm beginning to sink too," he thought, and a chill crept over him. "I must pull myself together."

At that moment he remembered that he had forgotten to ask Davidenko if he had given the pamphlets to the workmen of their party at Arbusoff's factory.

The doctor poured out some more beer, but Tchish had suddenly become disgusted with the doctor, the beer, the sleepy waiter, and the courtyard of the fire-station, peacefully slumbering in the sunshine. He got up and shook hands with him.

" You're a stick-in-the-mud, Doctor, nothing more." In spite of everything he was glad to have had the last word.

Dr. Arnoldi made no reply, and only raised his small clever eyes, in which there was a momentary expression of irony. But it passed so quickly that Tchish did not notice it.

As he hurried down the boulevard once more, where a policeman stood motionless, covered with dust and bleached by the sun, the doctor's carriage overtook him. The massively fat man sat perfectly still on the small seat and gave the impression of sleeping, leaning on his stick. The dust rose up like a heavy cloud behind the wheels and it was a long time before it settled again.

" And yet he still goes to see his patients," thought Tchish mechanically. He even recollects that invalids praised the doctor and spoke almost tenderly of him, and so relenting, came to the conclusion that he was " an unlucky man—a queer, broken-down fellow, but better than a lot of others."

CHAPTER III

TCHISH paced from one corner of the room to the other, smoking large cigarettes without ceasing. The room was small and stuffy, with only one window and bare, dirty walls. It always annoyed Tchish that the worst room in the merchant's great big house should be reserved for lessons. His pride was hurt, but he consoled himself by despising everything from the bottom of his heart—the broad, ugly stone house, the sheds full of fish and tar, the crude Viennese furniture, the homely flowers on the windowsills, and finally, the owners, fat, short-necked people who absolutely reeked of fish and copper money.

Instead of fresh air, the pungent, penetrating smell of fish and oil came in through the open window. The large courtyard, with its huge sheds, was as crowded and noisy as a fair. Powerful cart-horses, clumsy waggons, broad-shouldered carters like cave-dwellers, moved about slowly, in a confusion of shafts, barrels, and mat-sacks full of fish. Swearing, shouting, and crashing resounded across the courtyard and even the air seemed overweighted and to press slowly forward like an ungreased eart-wheel.

Tchish with his classics, his physics, and his geography seemed in comparison as strange and noxious as a little worm which crawls into a fine turnip, smelling of earth and manure.

He smoked his cigarettes nervously, looked irritably out of the window and translated, trying with his thin, sharp voice to drown the noise of the yard :

“ Leonidas occupied Thermopylæ with three hundred Spartans. . . .”

He looked malevolently at the two closely cropped heads before him with their rosy cheeks and protruding ears, transparent as sucking-pigs’.

His face was pale, overtired, with lines at the corners of the mouth, like those of old people, and the bird-like tuft on his head hung down dankly. And he hated everything—the

ink-stains on the boys' dirty fingers, and the Greeks, and his own useless voice. Without realizing it, he felt that the Hellenes with their creative battling life were out of place in this dirty utilitarian house ; they were allowed less room than the fish and the oil.

Time will pass. The ruddy throats will turn to lumps of fat, supporting bull-like heads : the prominent ears will curl up till they look like those of fat pigs : the ink-stained fingers will clench into a horny fist, made to beat and oppress. And the Greeks, those apostles of culture, who dreamt of the future splendour of the race would have scorned to own those pot-bellied, bullet-headed beings as their descendants.

The student's weary voice, trying to drown the noise, resounded miserably. He dug the boys in the ribs, and looked over their shoulders at their exercise-books. The blotted characters scrawled across the dirty pages, and it was difficult to recognize in them clear, living, human words.

"They write like clever monkeys," thought Tchish disgustedly.

There was a soft knock at the door.

"Come in !" he called ; and a big girl, his pupils' sister, entered. She was well-developed, fair and tall, with thoughtful grey eyes and curved confiding lips.

"May I come in here to you ?" she asked in a drawling, singing voice, coming, however, without waiting for an answer into the room.

"Please do," muttered Tchish indistinctly through his teeth, and went on dictating.

He did not like her visits, nor did he care for the girl herself, because she seemed to him only a part of the merchant's house. It had not struck him that she was out of harmony with her surroundings, though he knew that she was the one to insist on the boys' being sent to the grammar school. No doubt she had had a weary, obstinate battle with papa, who wanted to put them straight into the business ; now, as if taking pains to perform a duty, she continually visited the schoolroom, usually sitting at the window, looking pensively out at the wide courtyard, her head resting on her rounded palm. She would sit for hours thus in the stuffy room, and this silent, superfluous supervision annoyed the student.

From time to time he looked crossly at her.

"Better for you to have been a simple peasant-girl," he thought, "running barefoot over the stubble, harvesting and weeding, loving some strong lad with close-cropped hair and a steel comb in his knitted belt—then you would be in your proper place, a beauty, a worker, a mother; but like this—your papa has decked you out as a lady, as a result of his extortions in ten villages. There you sit at the window, a parasite; you have finished school, and read three dozen novels, and now you don't know what to do with yourself. Silly little fool, you'll soon spread like a beer-barrel. . . ."

Tchish walked up and down, more and more annoyed. The boys snored through their noses, played about on their chairs, covered themselves with ink; the girl sat at the window and stared at the sky with her large eyes. The last waggons left the courtyard, and from somewhere or another was wafted a refreshing current of air, as if a window had been opened from the yard into the shady garden. When the clock struck six, Tchish said: "That's enough."

The boys heaved a sigh of relief, the dirty exercise-books were flung aside, and a great pool of ink, in which a fly foolishly committed suicide at once, spread over the table. The elder brother jumped out of the window; the younger wished to ask some question, but he only gaped foolishly and slunk sheepishly out by the door. Tchish put his books together, and, taking down his old blue-bordered cap, went up to take leave of the girl, who was still sitting at the window, lost in thought.

"Good-bye, Elisaveta Petrovna," he said.

The girl slowly extended her hand and raised her eyes. To his astonishment Tchish observed a peculiar expression in them; the girl evidently wished to ask him something, and did not dare to. She even blushed, which made her appear much more delicate and charming.

"Are you going already?" she asked at length. It was not what she had meant to say, and she blushed still more.

"Yes," answered Tchish, somewhat astonished, and vexed at the senseless question. "I can't stay the night here," he thought.

The childish shyness, unexpected in the reserved young woman and betraying some excited longing, made no impression on him. He was only annoyed at being delayed by such idle questions. He longed ardently to get into the fresh air as soon as possible and to recover from his teaching, which began at nine o'clock in the morning and did not come to an end till the sun went down and evening fell on the Steppes.

"Has she fallen in love with me?" he thought mockingly, and cynically a vision of her fresh beauty rose up before him.

"I wanted to ask you . . ." The girl began to speak hurriedly, but suddenly went on quietly, almost wearily: "Do you know the artist Uchenieff?"

"Yes, I know him," answered Tchish, with an ugly laugh, and thinking: "You too already . . . lucky beggar."

The girl, without noticing his sneers, passed her hand through her hair and said, looking straight into his face:

"They say here that he is an extraordinarily interesting man. Is it true?"

"There are no extraordinary people. And even if there were, they wouldn't be here," answered Tchish angrily.

"All the same . . ."

"Yes, what? . . . That's it, the gentleman of pleasing aspect . . . black eyes, dark, a Don Juan . . ."

"Don Juan . . ." repeated the girl thoughtfully.

Tchish became suddenly enraged.

"For country cousins, of course. We have Don Juans like that all over the place—sitting behind every counter at the post office. We call them devourers of hearts—suitably enough. Not a very noble occupation, but a pleasant one."

"But is it true that a girl nearly shot herself in the spring on his account?" she asked quietly.

Tchish was furious.

"Perhaps on his account . . . how do I know? There are really more interesting things, Elisaveta Petrovna, than the raking up of provincial scandals for the benefit of bored young ladies. . . . Are there so few geese in the world? . . . It's very simple . . . she had a child—excuse

my putting it so plainly—and he ran away. Heroes, damn them, have nothing else to do . . . at a time, when the whole of Russia . . . well, confound him. . . . good-bye." Unexpectedly, suddenly, Tchish broke off.

He had spoken coarsely on purpose and, had he dared, would have used still stronger language, simply to offend this idle creature who, he was convinced, was dreaming of some strong husband and of all the loafing ne'er-do-wells who do nothing but lead country-girls astray. He expected the girl to be hurt or embarrassed, but she barely shrugged her shoulders and said, without moving a muscle, and looking straight at him with her grey eyes :

" So you don't like him. . . . Good-bye."

" I wish you good day." Annoyed, Tchish gave her his hand and fled from the room like an irritated sparrow.

The girl, however, stayed a little longer at the window. She gazed earnestly at the sky, whose pure burning colours above the garden gave promise of a clear evening. Then she got up, took a few steps and stretched herself repeatedly, placing her rosy elbows behind her head. She closed her big grey eyes a little, and for a second a strange cunning glitter sparkled under the drooping lashes. But it vanished immediately. The girl let her arms fall back and went languidly out of the room.

CHAPTER IV

DR. ARNOLDI went into the courtyard, leaning heavily on his stick. He dragged his clumsily-built frame over the ground like some enormous burden.

There was something tragic about the bent back and the hard, massive head, a heartfelt weariness that told of a spent life. It seemed as if he had not only to cross the courtyard, but like the Wandering Jew, to pursue an aimless path, without reason and without joy. His fat heavy face held no other expression than that of utter indifference; there was no room in it for joy or sorrow, for wishes or regrets.

An old watch-dog, lying sulkily in front of his kennel, moved his chain and rubbed himself against it when he saw Dr. Arnoldi. He was used to seeing the doctor come every day and probably took the slow, clumsy figure for a thing of no significance in life.

The courtyard was small and homely, and the broad sun burnt down like a furnace. There were still gay flower-beds in the little garden, tended with love and care, but the flowers were dusty, drooping, and trodden down, as though some one persisted in making his way to the house across them with heavy, stumbling footsteps.

Close to the front door, an old, worn arm-chair stood in the middle of the path, evidently to be aired. Its stained leather cover stared in an impudent grimace, and Dr. Arnoldi's eyes were mechanically drawn to it as he went up the steps.

The door was ajar, and the doctor, who was accustomed to it, pushed it open. Nobody was in the hall, where the air was unbearably stuffy and oppressive. He hung his hat up wearily on a nail, put his heavy stick in the corner, and went on. The simple, old-fashioned sitting-room awaited him in sorrowful silence. The dusty furniture, which had obviously not been touched for some time, was clumsily arranged along the walls.

It was quiet everywhere. Only a great black fly circled

above the round table, and its buzzing seemed to be heard all over the house.

Dr. Arnoldi looked into the next room. There was only one window, which apparently gave on to a covered balcony, for the outlines of the writing-table, the arm-chair, and the dusty long-unopened book-cases were hardly visible in the semi-darkness.

Nothing stirred. Only in the dim background of the dark window was the black outline of a figure, the hands supporting a grey, almost bald, head, which was so far sunk in a chair that the face was invisible.

"Ivan Ivanovitch," called the doctor softly, standing on the threshold.

The head did not move, the sparse grey hairs scarcely shone; there were deathly blue spots on the dry bony hands.

"Ivan Ivanovitch," cried the doctor again, more loudly.

There was only an oppressive silence, terrible and death-like, from the motionless head with the red mottled neck. But it was not death yet, for as Dr. Arnoldi looked more closely, he saw that the scanty grey hair moved gently with every breath. The doctor coughed and turned round irresolutely, and at that moment he heard quick steps in the next room, and a small woman with grey hair and a sorrowful face came into the guest-room.

"Oh! there you are, Doctor," she said, making a sad gesture, and peering through the semi-darkness of the room.

"No change?" asked Dr. Arnoldi. The old woman raised her hand again, and the weak, hopeless movement indicated boundless dejection and weariness. But she went to the invalid's arm-chair and touched his shoulder.

"Ivan Ivanovitch, here's the doctor."

The head did not move.

"The doctor has come, Ivan Ivanovitch," she repeated.

All at once the head began to move, trembling and uncertain, and the sick man turned his grey-bearded face towards the doctor, and looked at him with sad, watery eyes.

There was a scarcely audible voice, more like a sigh, and the invalid hastily made an attempt to stand up.

"Don't move, don't move!" said Dr. Arnoldi, but Ivan

Ivanovitch had already got on to his stiff, weak legs, and on his tired face was a friendly smile.

This smile was ghastly and told of a heartrending battle, the contrast between the polished manners of happier days and the helplessness and miserable shame of old age for its own weakness and need.

The old woman took hold of him gently under the arms, and the thin joints in the shabby black clothes went trembling across the room, just as a skeleton from a school of anatomy might have moved about in a professor's well-cut coat.

The old man took his seat in the arm-chair, and the doctor sat down heavily opposite to him and examined him attentively.

"Well, and how do you feel?"

Ivan Ivanovitch smiled miserably, almost guiltily.

"How should I feel—bad."

"How's the appetite?"

"Pretty fair—I eat plenty."

"Oh! nonsense!" cried the old woman.

"Yes, indeed . . . I do eat." The old man felt hurt and his voice shook like a peevish child's. "Only to-day I ate first some soup and then those . . . what are they called . . . those . . . those early berries . . . little berries?"

Dr. Arnoldi looked questioningly at the old woman.

"Strawberries," she said to the old man, and smiled shyly.

"Yes, yes . . . strawberries," he slowly corrected himself, and moved the fingers of his thin hands, which lay on his knees, in an embarrassed kind of way, as if he were trying to make out that the word had only slipped his memory by chance, and that he attached no importance to it.

The doctor was silent and looked at him closely, as though to follow the processes of gradual decay, the progress of death's mysterious work—paralysing the brain, weakening the sight and bringing the tired old heart that had beaten so long, to a standstill. And he remembered how, as a young student, he had watched for the first time in the microscope the development of a living cell in a decaying tissue. Before his astonished gaze something had

whirled round with colossal speed within the small compass of the microscope, showing at its edge a remarkable spectrum and making continual efforts to increase its speed. A little world turning round its own invisible axis. As he gazed, he felt an inexplicable anxiety, and longed to put a stop to the awful motion. But the moment the transparent thread, that living something under the glass which a few seconds before was non-existent, began to move systematically, Dr. Arnoldi's mood changed to one that was at once joyful and oppressive. He could not express in words what it was that gave a peculiar significance to this unforgettable picture, but he recognized in it something greater than himself, in comparison with which his arrogant, youthful intellect seemed trivial and his own life lost all meaning and value. That evening the student Arnoldi got dead drunk.

"Well, and what about your Metchnikoff . . . is he working at his . . . what is it? what is there new?" said Ivan Ivanovitch suddenly, and stared at the doctor, his tearful eyes unnaturally bright.

Dr. Arnoldi understood the heart-rending look, understood the dying man's impulse to cling to something, even to a novelty, in order not to lose touch with the life that was speeding away.

"Yes, well . . . he's going on with his experiments, at present he can say nothing for certain," replied the doctor, one word slowly following the other. He would have liked his answer to sound simple and natural, so that the invalid should not notice that he was not being treated like a man in health. But his tongue refused to utter the words, and his voice was forced. And yet he would have hated not to have shown an interest in the old man's conversation, the old professor, whose name had left its mark on scientific literature, and from whose books Dr. Arnoldi himself had gleaned his ideas of life, of law and of justice.

"Nothing," repeated Ivan Ivanovitch, and relapsed into thought.

Dr. Arnoldi, who was still observing him attentively, waited. All at once Ivan Ivanovitch became restless.

"What is it, Ivan Ivanovitch?" said the old woman, her faithful eyes fixed on the sick man.

"Yes, we and the doctor . . . will eat those . . . what are they now . . . straw—rasp . . ." He took the greatest pains to remember the word, looked guiltily at the doctor, and at last brought out anxiously: "Grapes, aren't they?"

The dying man was obviously much distressed, and made fruitless attempts to control his torpid brain. It was painful and at the same time ridiculous to watch him. A look of pain passed across the doctor's fat face.

"Strawberries," said the old woman again.

"Yes . . . of course . . ." and as Ivan Ivanovitch fixed his eyes on the doctor, he said with an indescribable expression of tortured pleading: "Now, you see what has become of my memory."

"Nonsense, memory," answered the old woman, evidently displeased. "You are simply ill, and have a high temperature, and so of course your memory is not as good as usual. . . . You'll get well again of course."

"Oh! my God!" he cried angrily. "That would be something—to get well again. I am really no child." He turned to the doctor again: "I did not think that I should ever have to go through this."

There was a long and painful silence. The buzzing of the great black fly above the table was heard in the stillness, and the air was so stuffy that one could hardly breathe.

Ivan Ivanovitch had supported his bald head on his hands, and one could feel with what an effort the weak human thoughts stirred in his dying brain—a flickering fire liable at any moment to be extinguished in eternal darkness. Dr. Arnoldi looked at him in silence, trying to follow up this train of thought so as to be able to grasp the sensations of one who knows that he is drawing nearer to death with every minute.

The old woman got up quietly, and made a sign to the doctor.

They went softly into the next room and sat down. The dying man remained alone.

"This is the fourth month, doctor," began the old woman hopelessly. "What is it, doctor?"

Dr. Arnoldi shrugged his shoulders gently. "Well, human life has its limits."

"Yes, I understand that, but why like this? Oh! if

only he had gone to sleep and never awakened. But this is torture. He knows quite well that this is the end, Doctor. You know, of course, it's dreadful when anyone is near and dear to us. You see, we have lived together forty-two years ; I ought to be able to bear it. But it is fearful to watch all that I loved in him die away—all that I cherished most—what I gave my life to—all that was precious and bright in him. . . . Just think, now, for instance, he has a mania for going to shops and making purchases . . . and to see the salesmen's smiles and the pitying glances of one's acquaintances. . . . Once during a severe illness I prayed to God that the most terrible misfortune imaginable might overtake us, if only he might live a long, long time . . . and now. . . . And, do you know, Doctor, that in the last years he feared nothing so much as this. . . . You can understand how terrible . . . no, there are no words for it."

"I understand," answered Dr. Arnoldi gently.

The old woman gazed long and fixedly before her, her wrinkled hands clenched convulsively.

"God, what is the use of our sufferings ? "

"I don't know." Dr. Arnoldi's voice sounded mechanical, like an echo.

And in the stillness which followed his words the movement of mighty wings, dominating everything, seemed to pass through the room.

Then the old woman began to speak again in her weak voice, like the humming of a fly in a spider's web.

"I am tired, Doctor, no one understands that. . . . But, you see, I'm only human . . . you see, and my strength has its limits too." And she complained that no one in the world realized her misery, the misery of a woman who is forced to live day and night with an imbecile dotard, almost a corpse, and to watch the gradual decay of a dear one. Her suffering was intense and absolutely sincere ; but it always seemed strange to Dr. Arnoldi that she gave herself no peace. As soon as one pitied her, she was annoyed, and when no attention was paid to her everlasting complaints she was displeased. She would not confess to herself what she wanted, and the worst of it was that her overstrained body and mind craved for rest, although her old heart suffered at the thought of his approaching death.

Against her will and as if hiding it from herself, she longed that he might soon die and give her rest. The old woman was afraid of this feeling, and hastened to assure herself and others that it was only painful for her to remain alone with the invalid.

"The chief thing is, Doctor, that there's no way out—no way out."

"There is always a way out," said Dr. Arnoldi wearily. "That is the one good thing in the world, that there is always a way out, sooner or later. . . ."

The old woman gazed horrified at his indifferent face, bloated like an old actor's.

"Yes, I know," she agreed hastily, that he might not pronounce the terrible words. "Everything comes to an end. But what good are these sufferings?"

"I don't know," answered the doctor, as laconically as before.

"That's just it . . . what we have to go through. . . ." From the salon came a faint, short sound, as when a quill-pen splits with a squeak.

"He's calling!" The old woman spoke in a peculiarly reproachful tone.

"Polina Grigorievna," called the sick man. They got up and went into the next room.

The old professor was sitting straight up, and his lean fingers helplessly protruding from his wide coat-sleeves clutched the arms of the chair. Offended, he looked at them with terrified distrustful glances.

"Well . . . have you had a good talk?" he asked, with childish spite.

"What should I have to talk about, Ivan Ivanovitch?" answered the old woman humbly. "Just little things."

Ivan Ivanovitch looked at her suspiciously and chewed with his sunken lips; he had taken it into his head that they were all joking about the old man who had lost his reason, and that in secret they all discussed when he was going to die. Beyond that again was a terrible emotion, but his weakened brain could not hold it fast, and helplessly he felt this last lonely sorrow.

"Some one was here," he said restlessly.

"Who should be here . . . the doctor was here."

"The doctor? Ah! there you are, Doctor. . . . I didn't recognize you. Tell me, Doctor, did you go to the meeting yesterday? Those silly fools . . . still talking about immortality . . . as if I cared for that! What do you think?"

"What are you talking about, Ivan Ivanovitch?"

The old man paid no attention to her, but continued to look excitedly at the doctor, as if he were fully conscious.

"If necessary, I could go out into the street, just as I am . . . let anyone see me who cares to. That would be nice, wouldn't it, Doctor? What?"

"Yes, that would be very good," agreed Dr. Arnoldi quietly. The expression on his face was one of complete indifference, which only accentuated the involuntary irony of his words.

"Good?" repeated the old man. He laughed triumphantly and winked at the doctor, as at an accomplice who alone knew of the plots they had hatched together.

"Yes, good."

Dr. Arnoldi found it difficult to understand these confused and apparently senseless phantasies, which in reality held a sinister meaning; he saw before him the ruin of a once clever and sensitive man, in whom the last remnant of intelligence was now being extinguished, and saw how unmeaning were the dreams of man's immortality, as humanity, death's prey, vainly tries to picture them. It was as though he saw some absurd, crude picture, painted upon a curtain by a dilettante, hiding the black emptiness beyond. . . . What were they, God, heaven, the cosmos? . . . a little heap of decaying bones, a light flickering out, and nothing more. One might argue about religion and believe in immortality as long as the intellect could work and the body enjoy life to the full, but now, when all might see how a man turned to a dying animal, an idiot, a mass of crumbling bones and failing organs, these ideas seemed as ludicrous as old-wives' tales of demons and fairies. The old man had relapsed into thought, his weak head sank and his eyes closed.

Dr. Arnoldi was preparing to go when Ivan Ivanovitch suddenly raised his head, and looking at him intelligently, said:

"Ah! if I only had the strength . . . only a little . . . and if only for a week . . . so that I might recover a little . . . remember everything . . . if my hands would stop trembling, and I could walk. I . . . should go out into the street, and sit on the seat."

Dr. Arnoldi could not help smiling, so unexpected was the dying man's modest wish. Already it pleased him to reflect how circumscribed life must become if to go out and sit on a seat represented such unattainable dreams. Thus might Napoleon in his Pantheon, had it been given to him to express a wish, have wept and pleaded to move only one finger of those hands for ever clasped to his breast.

The doctor's heavy face twitched again involuntarily.

The old woman looked at him, trying not to blink, though her eyes were full of tears. They held no longer that secret longing for approaching rest, but only an unending, touching compassion.

"Well, Polina Grigorievna," said the doctor, rising. "It's nothing new. Go on giving spermin. If the temperature should rise give him aspirin."

He wanted to take leave of the old professor, but the latter had once more supported his bald, trembling head on the bones of his dead hands, and shut his eyes; tears of weakness hung in them.

Polina Grigorievna went out with the doctor, and while he took his stick and hat she again began to speak of her weariness, to say that her strength was failing, and that she sometimes longed to lie beneath the earth, seeing nothing, hearing nothing, feeling nothing. Both realized the uselessness of words—every word that human tongue could produce.

At this moment a fashionable, well-developed woman, evidently pregnant, came into the hall, assertive and pleased with herself. Behind her was a smart officer with a reddish moustache.

"Why talk so much about it, mamma?" the lady interrupted her loudly and angrily, barely noticing Dr. Arnoldi. "Why go on talking about it? It's a case of must . . . it's hard . . . but what's to be done?"

The old woman winced. Suffering had made her sensitive.

"I know it's my duty, Lidotchkka, but it's very hard."

The young woman shrugged her shoulders carelessly but determinedly, and the delicate lace of her full dress, which was designed to conceal her condition, filled the entire hall with a faint perfume, blending with that of the healthy young woman herself. Dr. Arnoldi looked involuntarily at her full figure and felt, without actually thinking it, a torturing amazement and shame that those who have the terrible end that awaits all before their eyes, could conceive and bring forth new life. And even to be proud of fulfilling their great purpose ! There was something immodest in the light dress, showing every outline, and the powerful rounded limbs, and the strong man following closely.

"Really, people commit terrible crimes"—it flashed suddenly through the doctor's head, but the thought passed, and he did not pursue it.

"And why did you put that ugly thing just in front of the steps ?" said the lady, half laughing and coquettishly making a grimace of disgust. "However bad it may be, one really needn't come to that. . . ."

"What do you mean ?" said the old woman, startled.

Evidently she had forgotten, or had not at once understood what was being discussed.

"Oh ! before one has time . . ." she let her hands fall wearily, as she remembered the arm-chair.

Dr. Arnoldi looked dully at the well-dressed woman and went out. In the courtyard he could still hear her cheerful voice.

"Well, how do you do, Papa, how do you feel ?"

The sun shone brightly, sparrows chattered in the garden, the delicate cupola of the church-tower glittered golden above the roofs and trees, and on the old cornices silver-grey doves shimmered in the air. Dr. Arnoldi saw the arm-chair and felt the breath of mortality which it suggested. Here was the end : life cast off all its decorations and showed the barren background. What used to hide ashamed in corners suddenly came forth and took the front seat, barring the way and destroying the gaudy flowers.

Dr. Arnoldi stood still, mechanically bending his stick, which jumped back with a dull sound. The dirty leather stared mockingly at the blue sky. Dr. Arnoldi lowered the stick, bent forward and passed on.

CHAPTER V

THE next visit was in a neighbouring street, so Dr. Arnoldi walked there. On the embankment behind him the bay mare that took him on his rounds went slowly up and down. The flaxen Nikitka sat solemnly on the box, with just the same expression as when he took the doctor to the club, or fetched water.

It was as hot as ever, and the dusty streets still slept in the sun. All the shutters were fastened, giving the houses a lifeless, uninhabited look. It was strange to think that if all the roofs were suddenly to be removed the eye would look upon a madly whirling ant-heap which knew no moment of rest—that behind each wall something was happening—somebody was laughing, kissing, weeping. In every hole and corner there were living creatures, unhappy, suffering, bearing children in agony, and that only to the end that they too should be crushed by the wheel of fate and helplessly await some other Dr. Arnoldi, as if *he* had any power over the inevitable.

And how many of those, who to-day were saved from death, would die to-morrow, only to endure the throes and terrors of death once too often. Dr. Arnoldi recognized clearly how unavailing was his hard work, and he had long accustomed himself to perform his duties without any special feelings of sympathy, whether his help was successful, or whether the sick died in his arms. The doctor preserved his equanimity and went on to other patients, as a watchmaker passes indifferently from one clock to another. But every day his brain grew more tired and his face more weary.

Out of breath, more by reason of his corpulence than the heat, which suited him, he turned in at a little gate and went through a small courtyard, smelling of leather, and entered a house where God Himself would not have been more welcome.

A woman, still fairly young, whose shy face was lined with

constant care, met the doctor with a despairing glance, which, as he knew only too well, meant that the child was ill. He had expected nothing else ; an epidemic was raging in the town, death went noiselessly from house to house, and little creatures who as yet knew nothing of life, suffocated and grew cold, and the tiny corpses were taken away from the town in hundreds to be buried in the sand of the Steppes. Firs were planted there, and every year the young trees grew more green.

" Well, how are we getting on ? " asked Dr. Arnoldi, looking round to see where he could put his hat.

Heaps of damp clothes were lying about all over the small, dirty room, which smelt of soap, coal-smoke and human exhalations. From a tub full of soap-suds proceeded wreaths of greasy, sweet steam and an iron smouldered on the table. Misfortune and misery lurked behind every dust-heap and watched with satisfaction while those who were imprisoned behind eternal barriers lost their last vestige of strength.

" Worse, Doctor, worse . . ." For some reason the woman replied in a whisper, and with her usual dread of losing a moment, she took the doctor's hat from his hands.

" Now, now, don't get excited, little mother. With God's will, all may be well," coughed the doctor and, without looking up, he wiped his forehead, breathed heavily and crossed the threshold of the dim, stuffy room, in which could be heard the familiar, congested rattle of a dying child. Beside the big bed with its large coverlets in which perhaps this little creature, now dying in torments, had been conceived and born, stood the townsman, a young fellow with bright eyes. He greeted the doctor with a mixture of fear and hope, moved aside, letting a cloth fall to the ground, and gave the doctor a chair.

Dr. Arnoldi sat down heavily close to the bed, hesitated as though collecting his strength, and grasped the hot little hand which instinctively began to struggle weakly. The child's dim eyes, which scarcely saw anything more, moved slightly ; it trembled and tossed more violently from one side to the other. Its scarcely audible crying was heard in the room like the squeaking of some small animal.

Dr. Arnoldi dropped its hand and relapsed into thought. He recognized at once by the convulsive tossing, the peculiar dimness of the eyes, the breathing, that there was no hope. There was nothing to be done but to take the extremest measures, though he could not count on success; only he would have a clear conscience.

Under the turned-up shirt he saw something trembling and beating in the little inflamed breast; the head, which looked unnaturally large, shook above the thin, boneless neck as if it did not belong to it, and the tiny face was puffy and red, as if some invisible hand with incomprehensible cruelty were squeezing the little throat tighter and tighter.

"Yes . . . h'm," murmured Dr. Arnoldi, deep in thought.

"What, Doctor, what?" The woman moved quickly towards him.

Dr. Arnoldi looked dully at her pleading eyes.

"Nothing," he said. "Boil some water . . . and then run to the Sumskaja to the assistant Schwegson . . . you know where. . . . He's to come here at once. . . . He knows about it, I've told him. And . . ."

The townsman reached for his cap.

"Here! wait!" Dr. Arnoldi held him back, vexed. "My carriage is standing at the gate, take it. There's no time to be lost. As quickly as possible."

The man rushed out in such a hurry that he knocked against the wooden frame of the low door. Then they heard the crunch of wheels, growing fainter in the distance. The woman hurried away to prepare the water, and the doctor was left alone with the dying child.

It was quiet and close in the room. Outside the sparrows' importunate chirping sounded incongruous. They did not know what a terrible event was taking place within. The rattling went on and the child tossed its head, heavy as a stone, with the rumpled clinging hair, as persistently as ever, on the pillows. The swollen lungs rent its little breast, the blood poured through its brain like boiling water, its tiny hands and feet were convulsed by cramp, as if some one were trying to break its body in fragments, and, unsuccessful, whirled it about with blind fury.

Now and then it seemed to call somebody:

"Ma . . ." it chirped like a little bird that has fallen from its nest.

Probably the child expected that the big, kind, warm mother, who knew everything, commanded the entire world, and was shelter from all life's ills, would come at once.

"Yes, yes," growled Dr. Arnoldi mechanically.

Now he felt its pulse, and now he went to the window and looked long and abstractedly at the many fluttering sparrows. As always at the bedside of dying children, his thoughts were made up of painful sensations, gloomy and depressing.

Dr. Arnoldi would always have been ready to give up his own life, without a moment's hesitation, if by so doing he could have helped to cure the sick or ease their suffering. And had he known who was guilty of this mass of useless agony, the old doctor would have gone up to him with fearless, open countenance, and cursed him—nor feared pain, death, or the last judgment. . . . So full of pity and bitterness was this man's weary soul.

But he knew that help was impossible and that neither entreaties nor arguments would ever make reply.

The sun will always rise and set, the spleenful earth revolve. All is in vain. He, Dr. Arnoldi, may weep or mock, curse or entreat, may run his head against the wall, all will be as useless as the wailing of the deaf and blind in the wilderness. Only one thing consoled him : the little creature would die before it had learnt to fear death, or to know the charm of this beloved or accursed human existence.

"Yes," he repeated thoughtfully. "That is so. . . ." Clear in every detail he saw the miserable life to which such a creature, the victim of hereditary corruption, is condemned, the cruel, gradual dying out which awaits his descendants. Nevertheless, this little being will possess the fierce tenacity of every living thing, and, should death not remove it, one more festering ray of wickedness, stupidity and sorrow must flicker in the world ; nothing could prevent it.

Dr. Arnoldi shuddered in disgust. In the doctor's overwrought brain was a resolve, formless as yet but fixed, though he was powerless to crystallize it. It was left to another, one whose intellect was keen and cool, to pronounce the words which Dr. Arnoldi was unable to utter. But had

his will been firm and resolute, he would have raised his great heavy hand and cried :

“ Ah ! Is it Thy will that this miserable creature that has never harmed Thee, but rejoiced in every one of Thy works, should suffer the extreme agonies, and struggle in torment until its pain becomes unendurable, only to satisfy Thy greed, till the measure of suffering that human beings can take upon them flows over. . . . But I, a free and reasoning being, whose will thou canst not break, I can rob Thee of Thy sacrifice at one blow and put an end to Thy miserable and cruel delight. . . . Perhaps the motives which actuate Thee are beyond human comprehension. . . . It may be . . . but I do not acknowledge them. . . .”

The door creaked softly. The haggard woman came into the room and, still on the threshold, she fixed her coaxing, imploring gaze on the doctor.

“ What ? . . . Has the assistant come ? ”

“ Not yet. I have heard nothing.”

The doctor looked at the child and sighed.

“ I’ve got the water ready, Doctor,” she said quietly, without moving or lowering her eyes from his face.

“ Well, that’s right,” coughed the doctor.

“ Doctor ” . . . she said, still more softly, and took a step towards him. “ Doctor ! ”

“ Well ? ”

“ What about Grischenka ? Will he get well ? ” Her toneless voice shook, as if her words would choke her.

The doctor blinked restlessly.

“ Let’s hope so.”

The woman looked at him incredulously. And suddenly the doctor felt that her eyes were growing larger, that they pierced his very soul and filled it.

Involuntarily he stepped back to the window and stared once more at the green patches of leaves which were blurred into one great wave as he gazed.

“ What big leaves ! ” he thought abstractedly.

“ Do your best, Doctor, and God will repay you,” he heard a whisper. “ You see, Grischenka’s the only one.”

Such a depth of misery and love lay in the whisper that the doctor could not think how, a moment ago, he had been able to contemplate Grischenka’s revolting fate—for whom

it were better that he should die young. Now this toneless whisper, these timid, anxious words awoke a flood of sentiment so strong and invincible that he felt like a grain of sand and was filled with awe at himself. "This is terrible," he murmured.

"What?"

"Oh! nothing. . . . I say, I think the assistant's here," replied the doctor, and went back to the bed. And when his colleague arrived, Dr. Arnoldi took off his coat, rolled up his sleeves and, feelings and thoughts forgotten, started once again on his fruitless task like a convict chained to his cart.

He washed his hands, long, carefully and with deliberation, splashed the soapy lather aside, coughed and snorted. The white-faced woman gave him the water, her every movement betokening the greatest reverence. The assistant, a strong man, unmistakably Jewish, busied himself with the instruments. His expression was as indifferent as if he were putting *sakuska*¹ on the table.

The child was still gasping and tossing.

At length the doctor finished washing his hands. He contemplated them carefully once more, passed them through the air, took his lancet and advanced to the bed.

"Now," he snorted, jerking his head in the direction of the man and his wife, "you go away; it won't do for you to see this."

The man, terrified, hurried towards the door; but the woman only fixed her pleading eyes on the doctor.

"I mean you too," he cried, momentarily annoyed; but his tone changed as he looked at her, and he went on with deep pity: "No, no, dear . . . you go away, or you'll make me nervous . . . there's no help for it. . . . Go on, go on. . . . We'll do the best we possibly can."

Thereupon she staggered obediently from the room, stopping once more at the door and looking silently at the doctor. Dr. Arnoldi turned away.

The child was suddenly quiet, as if it felt the approach of something terrible, and it gazed obstinately at the doctor with eyes that grasped nothing, and that yet were trying to understand. It tried to throw itself on to its side again,

¹ A Russian entrée.

but the assistant's strong hands, covered with reddish hair, grasped it skilfully and held it fast. Slowly the doctor fingered the swollen little throat, in which every small vein was throbbing, and the narrow blade of the shining knife cut through the skin. Unerringly it cut, as if endowed with a will of its own. For a moment he felt the repulsive sensation of tearing through living tissue, red globules poured out and the blood flowed in a thin stream underneath the doctor's great fingers and encircled the little throat with a red band. The child seemed to be dead, when a slight trembling shudder passed through it. A tube, which at once became covered with blood, was introduced into the dark gurgling slit, and all at once the laboured breathing ceased. It was as if a sudden absolute stillness had taken hold of the world and benumbed everything around, heedful of a great mystery.

New, regular breaths, clear as air, tender and light as the noblest music that the human ear can hear, could be distinguished in the room.

"Done," said the red-haired assistant, complacently.

Dr. Arnaldi was in a trance-like condition, only his eyes looked strained and penetrating. He stood long and silently bending over the bed; at last he made a short gesture with his fat hand, which was obviously trembling. "No . . . too late."

The child lay still, its hands peacefully folded. But its little face was pale, and a bluish shadow crept over it.

The liberated breathing grew fainter and fainter.

CHAPTER VI

IT was already nearing evening when Dr. Arnoldi, dead-tired and perspiring, went back through the courtyard.

The sun had set, and pure, rich colours intermingled with the saffron shades of the clouds. The darkened gardens had lost all at once their dustiness and dryness ; they were a deep green, filled with mysterious twilight, with freshness and beauty. A light breeze played round Dr. Arnoldi's burning face and caressed his brow with refreshing airs.

Joyful, relieved voices were heard on every side, as if some burden had been removed and everyone breathed more freely. Somewhere there was laughter, somebody called out with clear voice to another, the church bells were ringing for vespers and the evening chimes stole out, soft as velvet, into the Steppes. Everything gave the bright, joyful impression which accompanies the fine evenings of long, unbearably hot days. But the doctor had left a close room where, in the twilight, lay a corpse fast growing cold, and shrill, unrestrained wailing could be heard through the open window.

"Oh, Grischenka ! . . . my Grischenka, for whom have you forsaken me ? . . . Oh ! Mother of God ! Mother of God ! "

To the doctor it seemed very still everywhere, as though even the distant heavens listened to her cries.

At the little gate the townsman caught him up. His pale face with the tangled beard was damp, his eyes terrified and desperate. He probably could not see the doctor's face ; he stretched out his clenched hand towards him, and stammered with trembling lips :

"Here . . . here . . . here . . ."

Dr. Arnoldi looked mechanically at the hand, and saw the crumpled edge of a green note.

"Oh, what's the good of that ? " he said, vexed, making a gesture of refusal with his fat, shaking hand.

"Take it, doctor. . . . What's this ? You did all you

could . . . we know that . . . God's will . . . take it." The man repeated himself meaninglessly, and continued to hold out his dirty, convulsively clenched fist.

Dr. Arnoldi frowned angrily, snatched the three roubles and turned away quickly through the little gate, stooping as if he feared a blow from behind. The flaxen Nikitka received him with his stupid, expectant smile.

"All over ?" he asked, when the doctor had sat down in the little trap, which creaked under his weight.

"It'll be all over with you one day, you noodle," answered Dr. Arnoldi abstractedly, prodding him in the back with his stick.

Nikitka laughed, greatly amused by this brilliant joke, and whipped up the sleepy bay mare.

The dust rose heavily behind the wheels. The doctor was already turning the corner when he heard once more through the evening air the shrill, heaven-rending cry : "Oh ! Mother of God ! oh ! thou very holy Mother of God ! "

The trap had turned the corner and everything was as still as though it had always been so.

CHAPTER VII

FAR away in the Steppes the cold green evening twilight was dying out, as Dr. Arnoldi, out of humour and over-tired, reached his last patient.

He had long ceased to distinguish between his patients in any way, and the same gloomy manner was his with children and women, with old and young. A month ago he had been called to an actress who was seriously ill, and since then he had been in the habit of visiting her every evening after his rounds. He had begun by trying a treatment, but as the illness was incurable and death might come at any moment, he abandoned the attempt. He came every day, sat down only for a minute, without relinquishing his hat and stick, and instead stayed for hours in the twilit stillness listening to the gentle chatter of the sick woman, who had grown used to him, and who told him little by little the whole story of her life, the chequered, disconnected life of an actress.

If ever anything of importance happened to prevent him from paying his visit, Dr. Arnoldi missed the soft voice, the quiet eyes and the pensive, gentle melancholy which flooded his soul in the sick room and the stillness of the twilight.

In the dim room the doctor, leaning heavily on his stick, his firm jaw resting on his folded hands, sat as usual on one side of the wide-open window which looked on to the garden, while opposite to him sat the invalid who talked incessantly as if in a hurry to make some important communication.

"What an evening, Doctor; how still, how pleasant. . . . I should like to die on such an evening. . . . Above all, I am frightened of dying at night. It would be awful, Doctor, for down there in the grave it will be dark, pitch dark. I am making a fool of myself with such wishes, aren't I? And yet I should like my last sight be just such a still, darkening sky. Then I shall feel easier: the day dies little by little, the sky grows dark, I too shall die. I have already grown accustomed to this thought. Don't

be afraid at my talking like this ; I shan't cry, like last time. . . . Why weep, when it can't help you ? . . . There's only one thing I dread : I can't keep my mind from dwelling on how they'll carry me to the churchyard and bury me and all go away and I shall be left alone. Then comes the night, every cross stands in its place ; perhaps it will be windy and the trees will rustle, but all around me it will be dark, quite dark. . . . Dreadful, Doctor. Of course I know that I shan't feel anything more then, but now I'm terrified of it. Doctor, you are so kind, so good . . . promise me that you will sit with me a little in the churchyard when they all go away. . . . Will you promise ? If I know you will do that, I shan't feel so frightened."

"I will sit there," said the doctor quietly.

"Good. Thank you. I know, Doctor, you won't forget me as soon as the others will. . . . Do tell me, dear Doctor, why you are always so grumpy. . . . But I am asking silly questions. . . . As if one could laugh and chat when one must stand at somebody's grave almost every day. . . . But will you think of me, Doctor ? That's absurd too, what I've been saying ; you have seen so many people die, you can't remember them all."

"I remember them all," said the doctor as quietly as before, and in the evening shadows not a feature of his heavy face could be seen.

"Yes, and that's just why you're so sad, Doctor. Do you know, Doctor, you are a good man, awfully good and tender-hearted. At first I thought you were dull and wicked, like many others. I was actually afraid of you. But now I seem to see through everybody. They do say that the dying begin to understand what is hidden from the strong. And so . . . I see your good large heart and know how hard it is for you. . . . Why is there so much suffering, Doctor ? "

"I don't know," Dr. Arnoldi replied.

"Don't know ; don't know. Nobody knows. . . ." Softly, as though speaking to herself, the sick woman repeated the words and was silent for a minute.

Her face in the twilight looked quite white, and only the dark eyes were black. Great troubled eyes, looking up with an unfathomable expression at the far clear sky which seemed to fade away above the garden. The reflection of

the sunset on her sunken cheeks and on her delicate, still beautiful hands which lay powerless on the edge of the rug in which her feet were wrapped, increased her pallor.

" Ah, Doctor," she began again in her old hurried whisper, " now I think of one thing that never struck me when I was young and strong : why was I so spiteful and quarrelsome ? I always had a kind of mania for persecution. How much unnecessary sorrow I brought even on those who loved me. . . . I always thought everyone acted unjustly, that they were in the wrong, and wanted to make use of me for their own ends . . . that no one really cared for me. I believed in nobody, and behind every word I saw a concealed, and of course a horrible, thought. My God, the scenes, the insults there were on that account. . . . And about such trivialities, too ; oh ! such little things. And how I was deceived . . . that alone. . . . People told lies all the more, because I could not endure the truth when it offended me. And they were afraid of me ; I was dreadfully inconsiderate. When once I was roused, I was up and at them . . . and I hurt everybody. Those who loved me most, well, what didn't I demand from them ? Who was I, that they should all mould themselves to my liking ? Yes, when we are loved, we should be thankful, but I took it all for granted. What joys have perished in that way, how much I suffered myself, and what was the good of it all when I might have lived so pleasantly and quietly. . . . How many jolly times I might have to remember, and how many sunny days were lost, punishing somebody, insisting on my rights. Do you know, now that I've not long to live, I regret every minute that I threw away so foolishly. . . . And I think, if I could tell people how it pains and shames me, face to face with death, to think of all the wicked and stupid things I did in life . . . lots of evils would disappear . . . lots. But I can't talk about that, only sometimes it comes over me so cruelly. I should like to run my head against the wall. Gone for ever. That's the terrible part. Gone for ever."

Dr. Arnoldi was looking into the garden, his head turned stolidly towards the window. Under the quiet trees some one was pacing noiselessly to and fro.

" What are you looking at, Doctor . . . that's Nelly, do you know her ? "

The doctor gazed silently through the window in meditation.

The invalid listened to the soft footsteps in the garden, and gently and coaxingly, as though she feared to wake a sick child, she said :

"She is unhappy. It's a terrible position for her. You know how they treat such things here. . . . Well, I did just the same myself once. Only now all that is nearly ended I have begun suddenly to think over so much, Doctor. And I understand how unhappy people are, how little pleasure they have, and how cruel it is to condemn them . . . for whatever it may be."

She relapsed into thought once more, softly feeling the edge of the thick rug with her delicate, transparent fingers, in which so little life remained that they looked as if they were made of wax.

Dr. Arnoldi was still silent and his clumsy figure was blurred to a dark mass in the evening shadows.

"Poor Nelly," began the sick woman again; "well, it was a moment of madness, she lost her head. . . . she's done nobody any harm. Anyone would think people were envious of each other. Happiness is so rarely found. And they exert all their power to ruin everything, so that no one may be happy. Well, they yielded, and she is going to have a child, . . . God be praised? No such thing, she has been turned away everywhere, lost her position as teacher. What's she to do? to live on? Perhaps it would be better to go on the streets? Anyhow, I have taken her in. But, poor girl, if I hadn't happened to be here! She works so hard all day long, looks after me, but in the evening she walks up and down in the garden, silent always. Now and then she sings to herself, quite softly. . . . it is very sad to listen to her. Sometimes I weep and think: 'Well, I shall die, and so will Nelly, and so will all those who persecute and despise her. Others will live, and know nothing of us.' Why should such a short, isolated life be poisoned by impurity and malice? I should have liked to comfort her and pet her, but she is proud. She even avoids me, a dying woman . . . it is hard for her, Doctor."

Dr. Arnoldi gave a short grunt and his chin sank still deeper on his hands. The sick woman looked at him

with eyes that gleamed even in the darkness, but as she could distinguish nothing she began afresh : " It's sad, Doctor. I'm grieved . . . for Nelly, for myself, for this sky . . . grieved that I must die. And it's still harder when one must die alone, Doctor. When I was on the stage, I was surrounded by so many people, so much light and life. I don't think about it, Doctor ; what's the use of remembering . . . nor do I regret that they have all forgotten me. It's my own fault. I did everything to be loved, just as I was. . . . Well, and they did love me : for my beautiful body . . . all that was good in me. . . . I used to be so offended when people wanted me to turn over a new leaf, nothing annoyed me more. . . . Yes, and now I have to pay my account. I am not even angry with Arbenin, who forsook me as soon as I was ill ; he is strong and healthy, and his beloved must have a healthy body and not a pair of dying eyes. . . . Yes, that's so, and I really never did anything to make him love my soul. It's only sad that human bonds are so loose. Some day it will be his turn to die . . . as lonely as I am, no doubt. . . . Then he will think of me with remorse. It will be just as hard on him. . . . Well, it can't be helped. . . . You see, I've come home to die. I have nobody here, but I just felt I wanted to die in the old place. I know it all so well, it's just as if I were not alone. That would have been too hard . . . in some hotel or sanatorium. . . . But it's a fact, Doctor, I went to school here. . . . "

Suddenly the sick woman laughed.

" How strange it is that we never know what is in store for us. Did I ever think, when I ran about as a child, or as a schoolgirl with books and a black apron, doing my home-lessons at this same window, that I should be lying here in the arm-chair pining away, the great actress . . . or . . . oh, well, I can't express that. . . . Enough, I've been talking so much, and no doubt you are tired, Doctor, and it's been very hard for you to listen to my chatter. Go now, my friend, I daresay I shall soon go to sleep. . . . Go."

Dr. Arnoldi rose heavily.

" Come again. I know you won't be able to cure me now . . . how should you . . . but just come and see me, dear Doctor."

Dr. Arnoldi took the outstretched hand with his great, swollen one, and, suddenly bending forward with his unwieldy body he kissed the poor dying fingers.

The sick woman showed no surprise. She only laughed kindly and sadly.

"Why—what for? . . . Now go, my dear friend. . . . God be with you."

Dr. Arnoldi dragged himself wearily from the room, but she remained at the window. Her face on the white pillows grew paler and paler, in faint reflection of the dying sunset, as when some delicate, precious drawing is rubbed away and fades.

The courtyard was still very light, and as people always do, coming out of a dark room into the open, the doctor marvelled at the brightness. Only in the heights the sky had grown deeper and the first stars shone out like everlasting golden pollen. Spicy and moist came the scent of some tired, sick flowers from the garden, and under the trees the first silent shadows were gathering.

Close to the gate the doctor ran into the girl. She stepped aside, startled, so that in passing he could only observe her hard, knitted brows and the half frightened, half threatening look in her dark eyes. She stood motionless in the shadow under a tree till the doctor had passed, following him with her strangely menacing glance; her delicate white hands were clasped to her breast on the dark-coloured dress.

"That'll be Nelly," thought the doctor. At the gate he turned round involuntarily. She was still in the same spot, apparently waiting for him to be off at last.

He shut the gate as quickly as he could. Now he was free and could go home.

Evening had brightened the little town with gay lights. The band was playing as usual in the distant park. He often met girls in light dresses, and young men with lighted cigarettes and loud cheerful voices, coming from that direction. At the end of the street could be seen the voluminous curtain of a travelling circus, lit from within, and the hanging chains with bright lanterns over its entrance. Everywhere was gaiety and life.

CHAPTER VIII

DR. ARNOLDI lighted up at home, took off his coat and sat down wearily at the table, on which a small samovar was steaming and a solitary glass waited for its old master.

The doctor's room was as uncomfortable as any in a third-rate hotel. The fusty exhalations of an old bachelor clung about the walls, the bed was too narrow for the big fat man. Cigarette stumps were mouldering in the damp on the window-sill, a soft layer of dust covered the shelf of thick green books. Moths flew in and out of the open window. They circled excitedly round the flame of the candle or crawled weakly over the tablecloth, their small thin wings quivering. Their huge shadows glided across the walls like bats ; but the doctor's own mighty shadow stood behind his back, reaching to the ceiling and then on to it. It looked as though some one were bending over him, black and unreal, in mute expectancy.

The coolness of the night streamed in almost audibly through the open window. The straining flame of the candle wavered ; in its waxen light the doctor's fat face seemed distorted by ghastly grimaces.

Sounds of distant music floated up. And although what was being played was probably as impertinent and insipid as the light of the gaudy lanterns and the waxed moustaches of the non-commissioned officers who were flirting with the milliners, the melodies awakened tender, sentimental feelings in the doctor's room. From time to time the solitary brass voice of the trumpet rose higher and higher until it died away on a melancholy, wailing note somewhere beneath the starry sky.

The doctor listened in silence, drank one glass after another of strong tea with sweet cherry preserve, and looked wearily now at the flame of the candle, now at his fat, swollen hands, and now at the moths, whirling in a mad dance.

There were many of them. Still they streamed out of

the darkness towards the cruel, dazzling light—green, white, yellow and mottled, always more and more. Small ones like the petals of tiny flowers, and fat hairy ones, sat motionless on the table in strained contemplation or flew violently upwards, whirled wildly in the sharp rays of the flame, and then described wild circles on the table again with a mad speed, agitating the wings with which they could no longer fly. Their exertions created a peculiar activity, silently significant of suffering and secret impulses. Some tiny corpses, miserably disfigured, clung to the candle-grease which the draught from the window was heaping up. Not a sound was to be heard in this ecstatic battle of life against the inexplicable fascination of the destroying fire.

Or perhaps it was only Dr. Arnoldi, who had kindled the light and whose sallow stony face looked silently down, who heard nothing. Some one climbed hurriedly up the staircase, ran along a small glass gallery and pushed open the door noisily, so that the flame of the candle danced and the giant-shadow on the wall flickered restlessly to and fro.

Dr. Arnoldi seemed to know who it was, for he did not move, but only glanced towards the door over his hand which was stretched out for the preserves.

"Good evening, Doctor," cried the visitor, and his voice resounded through the stillness of the lonely room, a note of youth, energy and cheerfulness.

"Have some tea?" asked Dr. Arnoldi, by way of a greeting.

"Of course," the guest replied as loudly as before, throwing his white hat on the bed and sitting down opposite the doctor. When seated he threw himself back, laughed and regarded the doctor in silence, glowing in such excitement that he might have been seeing him for the first time and was astonished at this interesting curiosity. Something played and sparkled continually in his large dark eyes.

Dr. Arnoldi, with an old bachelor's habits, fetched out a fresh glass, washed it carefully and slowly wiped it, and after pouring out the tea, as strong as beer, pushed it towards the visitor. "Have some preserved cherries?"

"Cherries? Of course," his guest answered.

Dr. Arnoldi looked sulkily at the dark shining eyes, the

white brow, the soft, curling hair, the whole manly, pleasant face, and all at once he smiled awkwardly.

"What's pleasing you, Doctor?" the bold young voice took him up at once. The doctor looked up again and said slowly :

"Drink your tea, Dchenieff."

He had not meant to say that at all, but rather something like this : 'How good it is to be so young and free from care, and how enviable and pleasant it is for an old man to look at you.'

But he did not say it; his slothful tongue would not move in his mouth.

Dchenieff laughed.

"Ah! Doctor, Doctor. Aren't you ashamed to be such an old owl? The evening stands at the door, stars and women are laughing, but he sits alone and drinks tea and preserves."

"You live through what I have," answered Dr. Arnoldi gruffly, "and then take my place, and we'll talk about it."

Dchenieff looked penetratingly at the doctor and his sympathetic face darkened. A vague unrest passed like a shadow across his eyes, and his lips trembled a little. But he shook his head again at once and laughed, his face sparkling once more with youth and happiness, as though a warm spring wind had chased away a chance cloud of mist.

The doctor observed the momentary abrupt change of expression, which held an inexplicable charm, and thought that in this power at once to express the subtlest movements of the soul must lie hidden the secret of that spell which the man cast over women. And he remembered the sad Nelly ; how she stood in the shadow of the trees, her thin white hands clasped tightly to her breast, as though bent on preserving some treasure, and how she followed him with that half-frightened, half-threatening gaze.

"What are you thinking of, Doctor? What did you do to-day?" asked Dchenieff, but he began unexpectedly to sing :

"Day by day we must bring
The dead to their graves."

Before the doctor had time to answer, he began to talk hurriedly in a voice which did not seem quite sincere.

"Now, you're always reproaching me. But who should know, if you don't, that it's all the same ; however one lives, it comes to the same thing in the end. One doesn't come to one's senses, anyhow. . . . No, then better to live so that the blood boils, that not a minute is lost, and that later one has nothing to regret. There, you might have got all that out of life, and you didn't take your chance."

"Is life only to be found in that ?"

"How do you mean, in that ?"

"Well . . . in women."

"What's that got to do with life," Dchenieff laughed. "Life itself is a fact and a very sad one at that . . . but I am speaking of its pleasures, of the pleasures without which scarcely anyone would care to go through with the business at all. Doctor, do you know the gratification which a woman gives ?"

"Now, now——"

"No now, but yes . . . you don't know it or understand it, or else you wouldn't be so taciturn and grumpy. . . . It's not a question of the physical possession . . . that's only the natural conclusion . . . the greatest attraction doesn't lie in that. . . ."

"In what, then ?"

"How shall I explain that to you, a corpse ? Look here. You meet a young pretty girl. At first she is a stranger to you, leaves you cold. . . . You can be charmed by her, but cannot touch her . . . everything about her is a mystery to you—her gloves, her own perfume, the flowers on her hat, the rustle of her dress, eyes in which one seems to find something, but which you look at as through a wall of ice. . . . Her beauty is not for you, you don't exist for her, but with another she is not like that. . . . She is tender, interested, passionate, and then, through some strange power which obeys your wish, this mysterious being begins to unfold for you, already you feel the hot blood . . . with every step she comes nearer to you, is sweeter and easier to understand. With incomprehensibly subtle play she enraptures you, now gracious, now distant, she fills your whole life with one single meaning, one single purpose. . . . Every

day she opens further for you, as a flower, petal by petal, opens to the sun, shows herself in her whole shameless fascination . . . and then comes the moment when she suddenly fires up, shame vanishes, the modest mien disappears, and only the naked body glowing in ecstasy and torment remains before you in all its beauty, and mingles with yours in a joy so frenzied and so furious that the whole world crashes into darkness behind you . . . only you two exist. Ah ! Doctor, what an abundance of moods and impressions in that . . . Now you growl with jealousy . . . now shout with joy. Now it delights you to torture her to death on slow fires, now to kiss her feet. . . . I suppose it's madness, but it's a madness of delights. The beauty of every young woman . . . when she loves you, everything takes on the colours of her love. Only then do you live with your whole being, with every nerve . . . only then do you really see how the sun shines, how splendidly mysterious is the moon, and how beautiful are the warm summer nights. . . . Do you know, when I was in love for the first time, it was spring, the snow had scarcely begun to thaw. Well, God knows where that girl may be now, but I shall keep the memory of it all my life. There was a time when I took her home in the evenings. It's dusky, somewhere the streams are singing and it smells of melted snow and the buoyant winds of spring. So many years have passed since then, but every time I smell melting snow at night, something tugs at my heart, you know, that touching, pathetic melancholy. . . . One would like to cry, to grieve over something, to thank some one for that happiness of long ago. . . ."

With wide-open eyes, as though he saw before him something of the fabulous splendour which was hidden from Dr. Arnoldi, Dchenieff gazed silently at the flame.

"True." In spite of his assent, Dr. Arnoldi lowered his eyes. "But one has to pay very dearly for these pleasures."

"Well," said Dchenieff, "one has to pay for everything in life. It just depends what for."

The doctor remained silent for a time, thinking of the white-faced Nelly.

"Do you know whom I saw to-day ? "

"Whom?" asked Dchenieff quickly, a strained, obstinate look coming into his face.

"The . . . er . . . your—what's her name . . . Nelly . . ." said Dr. Arnoldi, without looking up and reaching for the preserves in his embarrassment.

Dchenieff looked at him as if he would have pierced his very soul.

"It's all over with the girl, you know," the doctor finished gently.

Dchenieff seemed to be struggling with something. At length he said hardly :

"Very well, Doctor, so it's all over. . . . What does that mean, all over? We were happy. God be thanked for that too. Would it have been better for her to have withered as an old maid without joys and memories, or to have married some official, perhaps? Just think, she would have missed something so precious."

Dr. Arnoldi made no reply. He really did think it was better to belong to a man like Dchenieff, handsome, hot-blooded, interesting, than to anyone else.

"Whose fault is it? . . . I didn't betray her, or swear eternal love. She knew what was happening."

"She was carried away," remarked the doctor cautiously.

"And I was carried away too," cried Dchenieff angrily. "She is the victim of our conventions, not mine. Let people manage life differently if they want to be happy, but not expect consideration from me. I don't understand that, or recognize it."

"You cast her aside," said Dr. Arnoldi still more softly.

"I did not. I want to live. Why should I sacrifice my life? There are many lovely women for whom I am ready to torment myself, and deceive the others. She wanted a love that would last for ever, and I couldn't give it to her. So we parted. Do you know, Doctor, I love her still; it grieves me that she should be unhappy. I never forget the women I've lived with, but I don't see that there would be any sense in destroying my soul to make one of them happy. And, as a matter of fact, is it such happiness to hold a person in chains? A funny business. Must one force everyone to live in this way? Perhaps it might be possible somewhere for happiness to last!"

"I suppose jealousy plays the chief part there," said Dr. Arnoldi.

"Jealousy?" said Dchenieff thoughtfully. "Hm, of course, but slavery too played a great part in the history of the human soul. It was abolished—good. But isn't marriage worse than slavery, and hasn't humanity mutilated that, doesn't it continue to do so? . . . But as soon as anyone protests against this slavery, the most hateful of all, because it implies the slavery alike of soul and body, of feeling, oh! of everything that is in us . . . then they cry out 'Stop thief!' . . . What's the use of talking about it. I will go on living as I do now, and shall."

The doctor hung his head and tapped his glass with the spoon. He had no answer ready, for he felt that there was a germ of truth hidden in this conception which one could not resist. He glanced surreptitiously at Dchenieff, whose expression became more and more bitter. At length the doctor said:

"Right! that may be quite true. But the pleasure will always be poisoned by others' sufferings."

"Do you think I don't know that?" Strange lines of grief twisted Dchenieff's lips.

"Cannot life be filled out in other ways?"

"What with?"

"Are there so few activities? . . . Well, you have your art."

Dchenieff smiled bitterly. "It's one of the laws of life, Doctor, that everything you do turns to sorrow."

Suddenly his expression changed. His eyes grew dim, a look of grief and pain crept into them. "Art? Yes; do you know what art means? . . . No? . . . But I know it; it's one single all-embracing grief. How often I've heard great artists say they would rather be simple workmen, officials who draw their pay on the 20th¹ and sink lower and lower in happy vulgarity. Of course that's only in moments of spiritual exhaustion. But just imagine what one must have been through and suffered, to dream of vulgarity as happiness. . . . Do you understand that? . . ."

"I understand." Dr. Arnoldi nodded.

"Because you must go mad to be an artist . . . because

¹ Monthly pay-day of Russian official authorities.

only a madman can live under the perpetual strain that drains his mind to the last drop, ever striving to subordinate all his powers, his whole life, to that curious, really rather incomprehensible idea, of transforming something into colours or words. . . . Yes, when one's working, it's torture on slow fires . . . everything one creates seems repulsive. You are ashamed of your work, . . . despise yourself : how can I be so trivial, so colourless ? . . . One would like to cry : why can others do it, and not I ? And the worst of it is, you can never believe you've done anything good. There's some strange discord in you ; when they praise you, you think it's only out of kindness, but when you are abused, then you think they are your enemies, that they simply don't understand you. And so it goes on till the grave. And what's the good of it all in the end ? ”

Dr. Arnoldi wanted to make some reply, but in the excitement which had taken possession of Dchenieff the latter gave him no chance.

“ I know what you can say,” he cried, his face burning, his eyes gleaming ; “ I know all the fine things that can be said of the glorification of art, it's only a kind of delirium. . . . Look here, I worked two months at my ‘Swans’ Lake’ . . . and what a lake ! What for ? . . . Well, that's not the point. Do you know, when at length the white swan was reflected in the dark water, like life and yet more beautiful—you understand, a proud, pure swan above the cold, dark depths—then I went almost mad with joy. I longed to run out into the streets and tell everyone what a mighty work I had created. I thought that if I had seen my swan in reality, I should have fallen on my knees on the bank, folded my hands and wept for emotion and pride. But when I came to the end, and saw the picture before me, I was miserable, Doctor.”

“ Why ? ” asked Dr. Arnoldi.

“ I don't know. . . . I shall hardly be able to explain it to you . . . it's such a strange feeling . . . well, as if I had torn away a bleeding piece of my heart and cast it from me. I suddenly felt that every bond between me and my picture, on whose account I had suffered so much, was torn asunder ; my delight, my love had melted away. I remained all alone, in an absolute wilderness, and the pic-

ture remained alone. . . . And then I imagine how my white swan will hang somewhere in the great cold room of a museum . . . let's say in the Tretiakoffski gallery. And hanging on one side of it will be the legend of 'Igor's Army on the March,' on the other 'The Sows' Pasture,' or 'The Hero at the Crossways'! . . . oh, or some 'Ivan the Cruel.' All nicely hung in a row. I shall be living far away, doing something else under the same mental strain. And so on and on. . . . And if I die after the hundredth picture, it'll be just the same as if I had died after the tenth. . . . In the museum it's always the same . . . regulated cold light, the silent pictures. Visitors wandering round craning their necks with delight . . . centuries will pass, my swan will still be reflected in the dark water . . . he can live without me. As if something, that was essential to somebody, had passed through me, and I am left behind on the rubbish-heap, a dirty old rag of no more use to anybody. . . . You understand, it's not myself, but . . . No, I can't explain it—" Dchenieff broke off irritably, jumped up violently and paced up and down the room.

His enormous shadow, bent across the ceiling, like the one standing at the old doctor's shoulder, followed him and paced from corner to corner bowing and scraping obsequiously. Neither the doctor nor Dchenieff noticed it.

Dchenieff strode up and down for a long time, and his face showed how the roused, passionate thoughts crowded forward in his brain. Then he stopped unexpectedly, shook his hair back in his accustomed manner, and laughed so clearly and piercingly that the doctor started.

"All that's nonsense, Doctor."

"Nonsense," Dr. Arnoldi repeated it mechanically, like an echo.

At that moment there rose up in his imagination the cold room of a museum, the rows of pictures in solemn calm, and, like a monument on a martyr's tomb, the white swan for ever frozen over mysterious depths.

"Ah . . . what did you say?" he asked again, coming to himself.

"Let's go to the club, Doctor, that's what I said," Dchenieff cried with somewhat forced cheerfulness.

"The club?" asked Dr. Arnoldi, sighing.

"Don't sigh like that, Doctor, for God's sake." Dchenieff shook him by the fat shoulders good-humouredly.

He was cheerful again, careless, as if it had not been he who shortly before had conjured up out of the darkness the deathly-pale ghost of the eternal swan.

"Well, let's go," consented Dr. Arnoldi, after glancing at him, and he got up heavily.

Dchenieff took his white hat, Dr. Arnoldi drew the everlasting linen jacket over his heavy shoulders, put out the light and at once plunged the room into darkness, in which alike the black shadows and the silent moths vanished without a trace. They went out into the courtyard.

Above them stretched the immense star-sown heavens embracing them with the chill of eternal immeasurable space. The Milky Way strewed its silver rosy dust over the dark blue dome which rose up to the ultimate heights. But on the earth beneath everything was impenetrably dark, so that Dchenieff nearly stumbled over the steps of the threshold.

"Be more careful—mind the steps," the doctor warned him too late.

"What a good thing you didn't wait till to-morrow to tell me," he called back gaily through the darkness.

They had only walked a few steps, when some one drove up to the door. They heard the crunching of wheels and the snorting of an invisible horse, and a light shadow was seen at the little gate.

"Does Dr. Arnoldi live here?" cried a woman's voice hastily.

"What a nuisance," murmured Dchenieff, who was vexed because he did not care to go without the doctor.

"Here I am," replied the latter.

A woman dressed in white came up to them. She was evidently much upset for, as she walked, her figure swayed like mist over the water.

"Excuse me, Doctor, please excuse me . . . I've come to you." She tried to distinguish the doctor in the dark.

"How can I be of service to you?" he asked slowly and quietly.

"I've come to you . . ." the girl repeated with a peculiar

movement, almost clinging to the doctor. "My father is very ill. . . . I don't know, perhaps it's a stroke. So I've come to you myself. . . . Do please come."

Dr. Arnoldi bent down from the height of his enormous bulk to look at her face, and saw eyes that looked quite black in the darkness, full lips, and a white shawl thrown carelessly over her hair.

"Who's had a stroke?" he asked.

"My name is Tregulova," explained the girl. It was she whose brothers were pupils of the young student Tchish.

Dr. Arnoldi had also recognized her.

"Ah, it's you . . . Elisaveta Petrovna . . . so your father's not well? What's the matter? . . . Been going on long?"

And disregarding the fact that the moment was inopportune, he gasped out the usual formula: "May I introduce you . . ."

In the wavering darkness Dchenieff saw by the dim light of the stars an unknown, pretty little face with large eyes and full, innocent lips. Scarcely hearing, the girl gave him her hand, then turned quickly to the doctor.

"Let's go faster, for God's sake."

"Very well." Dr. Arnoldi sighed heavily.

The girl ran on, almost pulling him after her. She had a light step, as if her small heels only struck the ground in play, and the doctor dragged himself along behind.

Dchenieff accompanied them to the door in silence, waited till the dust raised by the merchant's big horses had settled, and then went alone down the dark street.

Unconsciously he had been excited by the girl's soft warm hand, and the perfume which mingled indescribably with that of the young maidenly body. He went through the dark street, looked up at the star-sown sky, but the vague outlines of the round shoulders in the light dress, the dark eyes in the pale face and the supple figure of the stranger wavered incessantly before him in the gloom. And it weighed almost painfully on his heart to stand once more before a problem towards which inscrutable, unfathomable sentiment was urging him.

CHAPTER IX

All the lights were burning in the club. Broad streaks of clear radiance from the open windows fell across the street to the foot of a dark church, which raised its mysterious cupolas to the stars. The hall of the club was full of hats, overcoats, umbrellas and walking-sticks. Dense clouds of smoke were already floating from the card-rooms, and from somewhere else came bursts of laughter in many voices, mingled with the sharp clicking of billiard-balls. Without noticing it, Dchenieff hung up his white hat on the hook and turned to the old porter.

"Who's here, Stepan?"

"Yes, who indeed?" answered the porter, politely familiar, as he took his walking-stick and put it in the corner. "A large party . . . the district-judge is inside, officers . . . Sachar Maximitch . . ."

"Arbusoff?" asked Dchenieff quickly, hovering involuntarily on the threshold.

"Of course. They've come with their party . . . Comet Krause, the Staff Cavalry Captain Trenieff, some students . . . a lot of people."

Dchenieff nodded his head without listening and went into the reading-room.

It was quiet there, and as the lamp-shades were drawn down the whole room was almost in darkness.

The student Tchish, his knee on a chair and his elbows resting on the table, was bending low over a newspaper. A stranger, who looked like a cross between a priest and a deacon, sat insolently in the arm-chair, his thick red hair falling over his shoulders. Looking very important he turned the leaves of an illustrated paper.

"Ah! Good evening," said Tchish, raising his head. "How is it that you're such a stranger?"

"I've been working," answered Dchenieff reluctantly. Tchish embarrassed him, because he felt his disparaging, hostile attitude towards himself.

The red-haired Father glanced at Dchenieff over the top of his journal. Tchish crumpled his newspaper, apparently not knowing what to say. Dchenieff took a book off the table, glanced at the title, and laid it down again.

"Yes," he muttered through his teeth, vaguely, feeling very uncomfortable, as though he were in the midst of enemies.

Tchish remained silent. The priest, behind his paper, never turned away his eyes.

Dchenieff did not know what to do; he certainly did not want to meet Arbusoff, and yet it seemed humiliating to leave the club, as if he were afraid of him. He felt annoyed and grieved. He cared for Arbusoff tenderly and sincerely; they had been to the same school and had lived together for a long time. Now they were to meet as enemies, and although he could not reproach himself, a vague feeling of guilt oppressed him.

Through the brightly lit door of the bar floated the sound of voices, the clatter of plates and unrestrained laughter. Some one came in from there and obscured the light for a second.

A not very tall, broad-shouldered man with tousled black curls and dark eyes, inflamed by drink and insomnia, entered the reading-room.

"Ah, Serge," he cried in a hoarse, loud voice when he saw Dchenieff. "Hello!" Somewhat unsteadily, but stepping firmly in his patent-leather boots, he went straight up to Dchenieff. [These boots, the red silk shirt under an open blue jacket, and the tangled hair gave him an easy, aggressive appearance.

Dchenieff got up and moved towards him, then curiously enough remained standing, as if on his guard. He looked very slender and delicate in comparison with the newcomer's clumsy boisterousness.

"You don't know me, what . . ." said the latter in a meaning voice full of scorn and anger. "Or are you afraid?"

Tchish raised his head, and the red-haired priest, who had let the paper fall to his knees, looked at them intently. The whole town knew the reason; it was common knowledge that Dchenieff had seduced and forsaken a girl whom Arbusoff loved desperately and ecstatically.

"Don't talk rubbish," answered Dchenieff contemptuously, throwing back his magnificent head.

Arbusoff, his hands in his pockets, was taken aback for a moment and looked up at Dchenieff with his inflamed eyes. This tense silence lasted a second, or perhaps less. Arbusoff breathed heavily, his broad chest heaving, like a bull rooting up the soil. He let his rugged-browed head with the curly, hanging hair sink lower and lower.

Dchenieff still stood with his hand resting on the table, waiting. He was calm, he even smiled very coolly and contemptuously. Only his narrow white hand trembled almost imperceptibly.

A dreadful sensation, like the presentiment of a brutal, aimless murder, brooded in the air. The white hand on the table trembled more and more, and Arbusoff breathed more heavily, almost in gasps. The red-haired priest wanted to say something, and suddenly jumped up, but he only moved his lips, which had now grown white. At the same moment Arbusoff shook back his tangled curls, grinned distortedly, his broad white teeth showing under his black moustache, and said in a strained voice which was meant to be cheerful :

"Ah . . . good evening . . . we haven't met for a long time."

Dchenieff slowly extended his trembling hand, but Arbusoff took a step towards him and embraced him tenderly like his best and dearest friend. They kissed, but when Tchish and the red-haired priest looked at them Dchenieff's face was pale and confused, as if he had been humiliated. A curious expression of deep sorrow spread over Arbusoff's dark, handsome features.

"Well, let's go and have a drink . . . eh," began Arbusoff in an unnaturally careless voice, taking Dchenieff firmly by the arm. "There are all our friends. . . . I'm drinking . . . been to Paris . . . drinking ! . . . let's have a glass, eh . . . you too. . . . What's the use of a dull life ? Where have you been ? "

"Let's go," answered Dchenieff softly, without looking up. "I've been in Moscow, saw my picture hung, and then I settled down on our estate ; did some work. . . . And how are you getting on ? "

Arbusoff's heavy, inflamed eyes looked at him with peculiar tenderness while he was speaking, but when Dchenieff stopped he pressed his elbow still more tightly.

" You're a fine fellow, Serge. You've hung your picture, you say ; why didn't you show it to me ? I like your pictures ; perhaps I should have bought it, or don't I understand anything about it, eh ? . . . Yes, brother, it's always the same with me : drink and scandal ! . . . that's all. And it's the proper thing for our class—for a merchant's son. Now, let's go."

And his powerful feet, which were bent like those of a mounted trooper, stepped out firmly and vigorously, in spite of the patent-leather boots, as he led Dchenieff by the arm to the bar.

Tchish, who had calmed down again, followed them with a scornful glance. The red-haired priest waited till they had disappeared behind the door and then remarked smilingly to Tchish :

" Well, I must say I was alarmed. Thought they'd come to blows. . . . You know, the artist took a young lady from him. She is now in an interesting condition, but he has left her. . . . It's a big enough scandal, the whole town is talking about it."

" You ought not to pay so much attention to gossip, Father," said Tchish, spitefully and with emphasis, scarcely moving his thin lips. " It is not becoming in one of your cloth. Really not."

The red-haired Father began to titter with extreme good-humour.

" Gossip ? It's the absolute truth. Everybody knows it. And as for your tongue, Kyril Dmitrievitch, it's very malicious ; we've all known that a long time. You are always pleased to crack jokes."

Tchish threw the paper aside and looked at him furiously.

" I'm sick of you and your familiarity, Father Nicolas. One can't even get into a rage with you. . . . At the best you cut a ridiculous figure."

The red-haired Father laughed incessantly.

Tchish spat, let the legs of the chair come to the ground, and went to the bar.

It was bright and noisy there. The bar sparkled with

the many different bottles, and the waiters running hither and thither gave to everything an air of festive industry.

A party of officers were sitting at a table with several spectacled, bearded men, evidently beginning to get very drunk. Their senseless voices shouted one another down, and were only interrupted by peals of loud laughter, among which the voice of the district-judge, a fat, heavy man with a large moustache, was specially audible.

Dchenieff had already noticed before that an adjutant of his acquaintance was sitting with them, a man with a stupid, impudent face. He related something, not very loudly and with great deliberation, but as soon as the others all burst out laughing, only a cool smile passed over his face.

At a large table, covered with plates and bottles, Arbusoff's party were having supper and drinking.

"Here, gentlemen . . . the falcon's trapped," Arbusoff called out riotously, without releasing Dchenieff's tightly gripped elbow. "A splendid fellow and no duffer at drinking, and yet, among other things, a great artist. . . . Aren't you, Serge? Aren't I telling the truth? . . . You know them all, don't you?"

Dchenieff freed his arm and moved forward to greet them. His idea was to get away from Arbusoff, in whose apparently unconcerned cheerfulness an inharmonious note could be noticed, like the sound of a snapping string.

Turning towards him, there rose the tall Cornet Krause with the face of a scornful Mephistopheles, the Staff Cavalry Captain Trenieff, pale and moustached, then a merchant's young son, a school-acquaintance of his, and a stranger, a taciturn man with untidy hair and unnaturally bright eyes.

"Naumoff," Arbusoff introduced him, "my new engineer . . . another good fellow . . . sit down, Serge. . . . Let's have a drink."

Dchenieff sat down between Naumoff and Krause.

"Where are the students? They haven't run away, have they?" Arbusoff's anxiety was exaggeratedly intense.

"They've gone to play billiards," answered Cornet Krause politely.

"What, again! Well, confound them. Drink, Serge," he cried, pouring out some vodka and letting it spill on to

the tablecloth. "Is that in your way? Give it to me." He observed that Dchenieff pushed to one side with his elbow a whip which had been thrown on to the table in the midst of the plates and glasses. He took the whip and put it on a chair.

"Well, we'll christen the new troika, Serge," continued Arbusoff as feverishly as before. "I've bought some magnificent horses at the market. Wonderful! They brought me here from the factory in two hours."

"So you've bought a new troika?" asked Dchenieff constrainedly. "Where's the old one?"

"The old one?" Arbusoff repeated the question thoughtfully. "Driven to death," he said bluntly.

The Cornet Krause turned suddenly towards Naumoff, slightly raising his thin Mephistophelian brows above the long white face, and said politely and not very loudly, "So, according to that, you maintain . . ."

"I say," Naumoff interrupted him so sharply that Dchenieff looked at him involuntarily, "that you yourself wilfully close your eyes, as children do, so as not to see what frightens you. . . . All the beautiful dreams of supermen—likeness to God, and all that sort of thing, are just as empty and arbitrary as the belief in the Second Coming of Christ."

"Right," Arbusoff answered heatedly, "what does that mean, superman? . . . My old father, God rest his soul, a Crown tenant, made drunkards of the whole district, and I shall crush them in the factory, till no one dare say a word. . . . We're all brutes. Man was always a flayer, and he'll remain so. And that's as it should be: Strike, strangle, beat down till the devils have throttled you. . . . They say you can't take your money to the grave. . . . Do you take humanity then? Love for mankind? . . . Drink, Serge. Why aren't you drinking?" he cried wildly. "Stop, I'll drink with you . . . let's clink glasses, brother."

Dchenieff raised his glass. Arbusoff looked at him piercingly again with his dark, inflamed eyes, and again the shadow of tenderness and grief glided into them.

"I love you, brother . . . always did and always shall. If I run you through, good—but I shall always love you . . . now drink."

Heavy fumes hung over the table. Tall Krause's slanting and intensely black eyebrows stood out in his narrow, deathly pale face. The silent Staff Cavalry Captain Trenieff twisted his long moustache without a word, with lowered head, and drank one glass after another. Naumoff looked around him with wild eyes, strained like those of a madman. He was only drinking strong tea. Tchish had sat down near them, when he emerged from the reading-room, at the extreme edge of the table with a glass of champagne before him ; now he was smiling contemptuously at all he heard. He was certainly bored among the drinkers, but he did not like to go away. It would have been hard for him to leave the brightness and the noise to go back to his bare, tiny room with the dim light and the disordered bed. Arbusoff went on drinking unnoticed, but shouted louder than anybody. He was obviously becoming more drunk every moment, his gloomy eyes were growing angrier, and his face had become mottled.

The red-haired Father came in and, slinking round the bar from the side, made a sign with his finger that a glass of vodka should be poured out for him. He pretended to take no interest in the party, and poked about modestly with a fork among the herrings. Arbusoff noticed him at once.

"Ah, Father Nicolas, make a pilgrimage over here ! What have you got there, vodka ? . . . Have some champagne, little Father . . . in God's name."

The red-haired Father left his herring, smiling and flattered, and came up, arranging on his way the sleeves of his cassock, as though it were fit and proper to begin by pronouncing a blessing on the drunken party.

"I salute you, gentlemen. May I take a seat ? "

The Staff Cavalry Captain Trenieff moved to one side, twirling his moustache incessantly.

"But really there ought to be a standard for what is and is not permitted in everybody's life," continued Cornet Krause very gently and politely, and as if he were not arguing but asking for advice. "Otherwise the life of the individual turns to chaos, not to mention that of the community——"

"Enough philosophy," cried Arbusoff.

“—And one won’t be able to live,” concluded Krause calmly, as though he had heard nothing.

“Must you live?” asked Naumoff sharply.

“Don’t you live?” Tchish, who did not like Naumoff, interrupted scornfully from the side.

“What?” Arbusoff roared suddenly in such a voice that everybody started and even those serving behind the bar ran forward.

Tchish looked round insulted, thinking the cry was meant for him, but Arbusoff, who had stood up and leant against the table, was looking beyond him. At this moment his face was quite white, the lips nearly blue.

At the next table all heads were turned.

“What’s the matter?” asked the adjutant coolly, looking haughtily at Arbusoff.

“Keep quiet!” roared Arbusoff. He threw down a chair, and rushed towards the adjutant, hurling Tchish almost to the ground. His lips trembled so much that he could not say more.

“Soria,” cried Dchenieff, “have you gone mad?”

Curious faces appeared in the doorway. Krause, Naumoff, Tchish and Trenieff jumped up without realizing what was going on. The red-haired priest rolled up his sleeves carefully, as though he thought it time to leave.

The handsome adjutant, grown somewhat paler, had risen too. The others drew back, and looked round, startled, in every direction; apparently they all guessed what had caused the scandal. Only the fat district-judge made a gesture with his hands and tried to exert a calming influence.

“Excuse me, sir. . . . You spoke to me, didn’t you?” The adjutant emphasized each word, without raising his voice, at the same time slipping his hand imperceptibly with a cat-like movement into the pocket of his riding-breeches. “What is your pleasure?”

“I heard what you said, you low hound,” roared Arbusoff, cracking the riding-whip across the table with all his force, shattering a wine-glass to pieces, and covering every one with the fragments. “Nelly? what Nelly? Miserable cur! Have you an idea whom you are talking about? Eh?”

And, turning to Dchenieff, he said distinctly and

apparently quite calmly : "Serge, he thinks he need only send a cab for Nelly, and bets that she would come, because she has nothing more to lose anyhow!"

Dchenieff took a quick step forward.

But Arbusoff did not allow him to come up.

"Listen, you!" he shouted at the adjutant again, "if you mention that name once more, I . . . I'll slash your whole face with this whip! What? . . . Be quiet! You aren't worthy to kiss Nelly's hand, you brute! Be silent! I am speaking."

He reached out furiously with the whip, and knocked all the crockery on to the floor. Plates and glasses crashed and rattled and were smashed to atoms.

"If you dare say a word . . . I'll wipe all your faces with this whip, you low rabble. . . ."

The adjutant had turned aside unexpectedly, and now he leapt forward behind the table with one bound. In his hand glittered the black barrel of a revolver. Most of them closed their eyes.

"Ah, a Browning," cried Arbusoff in great delight.
"Now then, shoot."

And so saying he struck out with the whip with all his might. But at the same moment Dchenieff planted himself in front of him, while from behind some one struck the adjutant a quick blow on the hand. The heavy revolver fell on the table, smashing a plate.

"That's better," cried in Little Russian the deep bass voice of the student Davidenko, who had come quickly in from the billiard-room. "Here, gentlemen, take the thing."

The tall Krause strode across the room, calmly took up the revolver, and put it in his pocket.

"I can give you satisfaction for this, if you wish," he said to the adjutant in a low voice.

"Nonsense. It's all the same," shouted Arbusoff, who had suddenly quietened down, cheerfully. "Let's be off. Let's have a drink."

With clenched teeth and haggard face, the adjutant wrestled silently with Davidenko. The student held him in a vice, talking the while in his indifferent voice :

"Mishka, take the sword away. Don't get excited,

adjutant. . . . What's the good if he punches your nose, or if you let daylight into him. You ought not to get so wild."

At length the adjutant succeeded in repulsing Davidenko. He smiled contemptuously and said slowly :

" We must meet again, M. Arbusoff."

" Good," replied Arbusoff darkly. " I always have the whip by me."

The adjutant again smiled scornfully, and left the room immediately, clinking his spurs and looking at nobody.

The rest of the party threw embarrassed glances at one another, uncertain what to do. The district-judge wiped the butter and horseradish from his frock-coat with a table-napkin and murmured angrily :

" One really mustn't do that kind of thing. . . . Just think, a millionaire. . . ."

" Shut up, old sparrow," cried Arbusoff gaily. " It's nothing to do with you. Come over here ! "

" I understand . . . of course I've nothing to do with it," - said the district-judge. " But it really won't do, Sachar Maximitch."

" That's enough. . . . Let's drop it." Arbusoff made a gesture of annoyance. " Now, gentlemen. To the defeat of the adversary."

Dchenieff sat there depressed ; his delicate hand, which rested on the table, still trembled a little.

" Serge," Arbusoff all at once said gently, leaning over the table, " it's your fault, you know. You're sorry, aren't you ? "

Dchenieff glanced up quickly, but lowered his eyes again at once.

Arbusoff stared at him for some time with watery, inflamed eyes. Then he made a gesture in the air, murmuring to himself : " Ah, whose fault was it ? " Suddenly he shouted across the room : " Waiter ! some champagne . . . quickly."

The servants hastened to clear away the broken crockery. They did not look at one another, and it was impossible from their manner to guess the dirty slimy gossip that would filter through the whole town the next day from these lackeys' mouths.

The adjutant's companions talked quietly to themselves, looking every now and then at Arbusoff, paid and went away. The district-judge sat down at Arbusoff's table and, still rubbing mechanically at a butter-spot on his coat, said :

" Your sins are many, Sechar Maximitch, but I shouldn't have thought such a thing of you. You know, it may lead to unpleasantness. All the same, honestly, what is there in it, really ? I was going to say to him myself . . . the young lady—of course it's true," he turned to Dchenieff, embarrassed, " but one mustn't talk like that. I was furious myself, to tell the truth. . . ."

" Stop explaining." Arbusoff looked round gloomily. " Besides, it's dull here. Drive back with me, gentlemen, to the factory. Eh ? "

Dr. Arnoldi's huge, clumsy figure with the clean-shaven, actor's face and the clever, lack-lustre eyes, appeared in the doorway.

" Doctor," cried Arbusoff delightedly. " Dear boy. Let's drive home."

" All right." Dr. Arnoldi consented indifferently.

Thereupon everybody hurried out of the refreshment-room, amid the pushing back of chairs and noisy chattering. Tchish considered and then followed them, disgust written on his face. Only the joined tables, the wet, stained table-cloths, and the smashed plates and glasses were left in the room. The waiters began to talk and laugh together noisily.

Outside the night was dark. The sky was ablaze with stars. Somewhere in the darkness the sound of bells from Arbusoff's troika could be heard intermittently.

" Now, who's coming, gentlemen ! " roared the drunken Arbusoff through the night. " Serge, sit by me. We'll take the doctor too. . . . Tchish ! "

" I can't . . . with the best will in the world," the invisible little student explained. " I have to get up early to-morrow to give lessons."

" What's that, giving lessons," shouted Arbusoff, grasping his hand. " Rot, none of that. Come with us ! "

" Very well." Tchish gave in, not knowing why, and equally unwilling.

"Are the new horses all right?" the tall Krause carefully enquired.

"Yes . . . wait. . . . Serge," roared Arbusoff, "would you like to look? Fine fellows. Stop. Pavel, draw up. . . . Serge, come here."

The quivering light of a match shone out. The heads of three intelligent, splendid horses, like those on a triumphal arch, with agate eyes and cautiously moving ears appeared from the black gloom.

"Look out. They are not broken in yet, might run away . . ." said the Staff Cavalry Captain Trenieff.

Arbusoff made no reply. He went along close under the horses' noses and illuminated them with the match, talking quietly and lovingly to Dchenieff or perhaps to the horses.

"Now, what? Really beauties. And their names tell you so, too; this one—Lovely; this, Beauty, and the shaft-horse is the best of the lot. . . . Look now, it's only that they can't speak, the dears."

The jet-black Beauty looked at them sensitively with her round agate eyes. The shaft-horse twisted its ears and stepped from one foot to the other. One could see how the thin, glossy skin, crossed with a net of smooth veins, vibrated nervously. The troika stood as if rooted to the ground. The match went out.

"Now, let's be off . . ." Arbusoff threw the glowing end away. "Sit down! Serge, are you ready? The priest hasn't been forgotten, has he?"

"Here I am, here I am," the little red-haired Father's voice came from the darkness.

"We are all ready," announced Cornet Krause.

"Now, Pavel, drive on."

The troika slipped sideways a little in the darkness, then straightened; the reins were tightened, and with laughter and chatter and the sound of bells it moved onwards over the dark road.

They rattled faster and faster through the streets, frightening dogs, tearing round corners and in their mad speed the outlines of fences, the white blur of houses, the church-wall, the blackened, shapeless shadows of trees with outspread arms, slipped past beside them.

"Slacken the reins, Pavel," shouted Arbusoff suddenly.

"The others can never catch us up, Sachar Maximitch," answered the coachman impressively, without turning his head. But he had probably loosened his hold on the reins, for all at once the troika bounded forward, the road flew behind, showers of dry clay fell about the passengers, and the air, which seemed to be drawn into a taut line, moaned and groaned around them. The bells sang lustily, unceasingly, wildly.

The town slept, and the white houses seemed to look down behind their closed shutters full of disapproval at the mad race. At a curve of the road the red point of a lighted window emerged and disappeared.

CHAPTER X

A LAMP was burning on a small table near the bed of the old Professor, Ivan Ivanovitch, who had spread out his withered hands on the quilt.

Ivan Ivanovitch looked fixedly at one corner, and were it not for this expression, which seemed so conscious amid the general sleep and silence, he might have been taken for a corpse ; so weak were the withered hands with their dead knuckles, so heavily lay his head on the pillows, and so sharp were the angles of the wasted body protruding under the bedclothes.

The little white-haired old woman lay quietly in the next bed, snoring gently from time to time.

Ivan Ivanovitch stared and meditated.

His mind was clear. His strained thoughts always ran in the same groove. Even if he could not find the right expressions for them, he did not notice it. It was only when he tried to tell others of his sufferings that the failing of his memory worried him ; it tortured him cruelly that his words were nothing but incoherent rubbish. He was ashamed of his decrepitude and painfully susceptible to the pity in the faces of those around him. But at night nobody listened to him, nobody pretended to understand his stammering, and then his thoughts laboured with iron force, without words and incoherences.

Death was near. Ivan Ivanovitch knew it. In reality he did not imagine that it would come in one or two days. He only thought he would not live through September, certainly not through the winter. But in comparison to his little bit of life the dreadful, foggy autumn seemed to be already near. And he had lived so long. He glanced back down the endless vista of years. In one moment he saw himself as a boy, and as a student, and as an old professor, ascending the lecturing-desk with dignity. Millions of unimportant events were blurred into one dim, colossal pattern : his marriage, the bad marks in an examination paper, holidays

in the village, journeys abroad, London, Paris and New York in blurred outline—words, meetings, numberless and endless faces. It was like an enormous panorama, flitting through his memory with mad speed.

The idea that all would be over in so short a time and with such appalling suddenness was inconceivable. Burial, the grave, decay, the absurd vacancy, never to be filled . . . the complete nullity, the absolute darkness ; they found no place in the intellect.

Ivan Ivanovitch forced himself to try and remember the death of his father, an old retired colonel. It was very long ago ; Ivan Ivanovitch was living in a country house, near the town, a young, happy man. He had come home for a rest, and above all to be with his father at the end of his life. But he could hardly bear to see in his arm-chair the imbecile old man, who for some years had imagined himself a field-marshall, while he had to be fed with spoonfuls of pap. In his father's house the close atmosphere of illness and the expectation of the approaching end was stifling.

His mother cried all day long, his father shouted words of command and curses, dribbling. And while this was going on, Ivan Ivanovitch lived in the country with his wife and little daughter, and only paid occasional visits to the town for decency's sake.

Oh ! that country house. . . . The clear nights, the green spaces, his daughter's little red dress flitting among the bushes. . . . Had he realized the value of that happiness ?

He had realized nothing, nothing. It had all been so simple and natural. He only wanted to get through the two or three months as quickly as possible and go to Moscow, where he was preparing to take up a teaching post. And when the bluish light of the moon streamed down or when the sun warmed everything so brightly, when he walked through the fields of rye with his wife and watched the slowly fading red, giving its benediction to the earth, he never thought about the sun or the moon, or life which is, and passes away and suddenly will be no more ; he considered instead the programme of his course of lectures, in which he was to unfold a picture of long-past epochs.

Oh ! that country house. . . . To go back, and by some miracle to cast off these withered hands, this mask of grey

hair and wrinkles ; to walk beneath dark lime trees on a moonlight night, to breathe in the freshness of night, unceasingly, with healthy lungs !

He needed nothing else : no books, no history of the human race, no celebrity, no vague cities of Europe . . . nothing but that the feet should walk again, the hands no longer tremble, nor the eyes fill with tears, and that Death should not stand behind him in dark corners. A breath of fresh air, a loud, hearty word, one minute without suffering and strained expectation of the end—that would be a happiness in comparison with which even the blazing sun would fade.

" No, certainly . . . it's all over . . . I am dying "—thought Ivan Ivanovitch, and stared into the dark corner where something incredible was happening amid uncanny whisperings.

And again he thought of the day when a carriage had come from the town with the news that his father was dying. Ivan Ivanovitch remembered the strange, eager coolness which had crept over his heart, as if his blood had begun to course differently, and his body to feel more vital.

He had not been glad exactly at that moment, but somehow uneasily curious. As if clean cold water had swept away all trivialities of life from his brain, so that it could arise before him in its whole stupendous grandeur.

" Father is dying," he said to his wife.

Then came the quick drive to the town, the wind in the fields, the wakeful feeling of oppressive expectancy. An old aunt with puckered, tear-stained face met him in the courtyard. He was dead.

Terrible grief had seized him at the thought that he had come too late and would never see his father again. He appeared very old, very good, infinitely kind and near to him. And it hurt him grievously that he had postponed the journey to him for a fortnight. Ivan Ivanovitch went into the dark room, in which for some reason the shutters were closed. It had already struck him in the drawing-room that an uncle (now long dead) had had the sofa taken away. What for ? The question flashed into his mind, but with no time for reflection he went into the bedroom. At the same moment a doctor of his acquaintance, now dead and forgotten, had stood up from beside the bed

with a hopeless gesture : "There's nothing to be done. It is all over."

Ivan Ivanovitch looked eagerly through his tears at the wet, crumpled pillows on which a head was thrown back, with closed eyes, so familiar but at the same time so strange.

Memory took Ivan Ivanovitch further. His father's corpse sits in a helpless attitude on the floor, leaning against the bed, near a basin of warm water. His grey head is sunk on his breast and rocks gently to and fro. Strange women draw the sleeves of an old colonel's uniform over his arms, and the hands are crooked and bent like a dotard's. One can scarcely believe that this is a corpse, which would fall headlong to the floor if it were left alone ; that it is the father one has known all one's life. It looks as if he were only pretending, as if he saw and heard everything, and had as well some particular secret of his own.

Now the withered body lies on the table, the feet tied together with a clean linen cloth. The serious face is distinguished by incomprehensible majesty, the tall, melting wax-candles flicker softly, night waits at the windows, ancient words are read monotonously . . . this is Death.

Ivan Ivanovitch feels no fear, but a strange nausea which seizes his whole body. And all at once he is overcome by a grief so bitter that he thinks he cannot bear it. His thoughts fly indiscriminately in all directions, chasing and effacing at random these terrible sights. But if they do sometimes seem to vanish, it is only because the deceptive activity of thought clings persistently to trifles, such as how Polina Grigorievna sleeps, what time it is, and how the lamp is burning. Yet all the time one feels something behind it all, gleaming like the eyes of a corpse through the shroud, and then it breaks forth again, expands, grows, fills everything, and becomes oppressive, as unendurable as death itself.

Fear mounts higher and higher, enfolds him from head to foot, the very power to breathe seems to fail. Every nerve in his body is tense and trembling. Faster yet he must seize upon some memory, do something.

But what to remember ? That death is a commonplace physiological phenomenon, that everything must die, and that even this moment comes to an end at last ? . . . That, opposed to commonsense, hard and clear as crystal, there is

yet a way out : the eternal, immortal life of the soul . . . God ?

And at once the surging thoughts are repulsed, the ghost of Death fades away and melts into a soothing, harmonious illusion . . . God ! "God !" thinks Ivan Ivanovitch, and holds his breath, so as not to frighten away the vague hope, fragile as a spider's web.

"God, my God, what does it matter to Thee ? I know it's ridiculous and foolish of me, a wise old man to believe in Thee like a peasant-woman. I know that only cowardice drives me to it. But perhaps Thou art, after all . . . have pity on me. Thou seest how I am tortured, and I am such an old man, so ill and miserable."

Ivan Ivanovitch's dim eyes fill with tears of compassion. He repeats his words as miserably as he can, with the object of moving some one to pity.

"Now, why dost Thou torment me ? If I could only know that . . . only a little ; it would be a good thing. . . . I should die, but not so terribly . . . and nobody understands it. . . . Polina Grigorievna . . . she pities me. How fearful, how grievous it will be for her to be left alone, never to see me again, never again. And we've lived together so many years and loved one another. But even she can't understand everything. . . . I'm even a burden to her. Perhaps I'm already out of my mind, like my father. Perhaps I only imagine I'm thinking, and in reality it's nothing but incoherent delirium."

Despair begins to take hold of Ivan Ivanovitch. No one pities him, he bores everyone in this imbecile, half-dead state. But all the same he once did great services to learning. He may have been left behind, and have forgotten much ; but there was a time when his name commanded respect. And his works remain, those exhaustive investigations into the history of mankind. People must and shall remember him. And so he will not die after all.

For one moment a door seems to open in the darkness on to a bright, sunny morning. Yes, the body may die, but the soul lives on eternally in his works and their influence. Yes, that is really immortality. . . .

The heavy door closes again with a dull thud. Again nothing but emptiness and terror. Books and thoughts

may persist, but not himself. What does it profit Socrates that his name is invoked on suitable and unsuitable occasions by unknown people, while he has long ago decayed somewhere in the ground? Is that immortality? . . . It's mockery! Ivan Ivanovitch is not dead yet, he has only grown senile; but what bond connects him now with his books? If only he had never written them, never pondered, never imprisoned life on paper but simply breathed and looked at the sun, which he will never see again.

Perhaps even Polina Grigorievna has to force herself to show compassion towards him. Nothing more binds them to one another in reality. He is dying now, but she will go on living, thinking her own thoughts, in which he can no longer share. And in two years she will remember him as a half-forgotten dream.

And now, while he is suffering and his whole being entreats pity, perhaps she thinks . . .

What does she think? . . . If only he could die more quickly . . . but that cannot be. Can anyone think he ought to die? . . . And yet it is so. "I am not so imbecile that I don't understand how heavy a burden I am to her. Half of me is dead already, and nobody wants me any more. . . . O God, Thou seest everything, dost Thou not see what Thou hast done to me? What a wicked, cruel thing. I am dying, yes, dying. . . ."

Ivan Ivanovitch lay still as a corpse. A chaos of words, a confusion of images whirled round in his brain with inarticulate cries, complaints and curses.

"Why hast Thou given me life? It was just a trap which entices me into this death of torment, and then closes on me. . . . I won't stand it. Who has the right to mock me like this? Be accursed with all Thy universe, the stars, eternity, and the sun. I hate and revile Thee. . . . Was that Thy object in wearing Thyself out with the creation of the world? Well then, take it . . . and be glad. . . ."

Suddenly Ivan Ivanovitch was frightened, and in his fright gleamed something like hope.

What if the reality should prove in the last moment not to be so dreadful, but simply refreshing and good? . . . Perhaps one ought to curse this Reason, to tear oneself away from it and to believe the priests with simple, foolish

conviction, believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting. . . . "Well, let it be so. I will believe, pray, do everything to please Thee, only not die . . . or die without this torment. . . . I can weep too. . . . Yes, I shall simply weep and pray—Lord have mercy upon me in Thy great goodness. . . ."

A tear stole out under his withered eyelids. And in the full recognition that it was all useless, that no one would have mercy upon him or hear him, Ivan Ivanovitch groaned aloud.

"Ivan Ivanovitch, what is the matter ?" A wakeful voice was heard at once, and the little old woman's grey head emerged from the bedclothes. Ivan Ivanovitch felt sorry for her. She doesn't sleep all night long, she gets up a dozen times, helps him to turn on the other side and tucks him up. And all the time she might sleep, while he worried, for it is not she who is dying, but himself.

"You go to sleep," he said irritably. "I only want to get up. . . . Do go to sleep. I am not disturbing you at all."

"What an idea, Ivan Ivanovitch. It is night—you'd better go to sleep. You need sleep."

"What's that to do with you ? Leave me in peace. You would be glad if I never woke . . . never any more." Ivan Ivanovitch felt that he had hurt her by this untruth, though they had only so short a time left to spend together, but he had no power to suppress his irritability : he began to cry.

And the very thoughts that Ivan Ivanovitch dreaded flashed into the old woman's mind—she who had lived with him for forty years as sweetheart, wife and mother, and who would have cut off her hand if it could only have helped him a little. What was most distressing about these thoughts was that they did not come from the heart that was convulsed with grief, nor from the mind that was ashamed of them, but that they were merely the physical results of sleepless nights, the sick man's whims and the whole atmosphere of senility which had weakened his frame.

"Oh Lord my God, when will it come to an end ?" thought Polina Grigorievna. "However it may be, he must surely realize what a hard time I have, and how I sacrifice everything for him."

But strangely enough, just because he did not understand her and was angry with her, her heart was melted.

"Don't worry me, lie down," she begged him sadly.

"You would like me to die sooner . . . but I—I'm not going to die . . . now I just won't die . . . just to annoy you." And in idiotic scorn he suddenly leant forward and stretched out his clenched fist towards her, slowly, almost solemnly.

It was so pathetic that Polina Grigorievna could hardly keep back her tears. Forgetting her hard thoughts, she began gently to raise him. It was only in the depths of her soul, in those dark, cruel recesses to which reason fears to cast a glance, that there was one impatient thought—If only he were dead.

"Well, come, I'll help you, Ivan Ivanovitch," she said, setting her teeth.

Ivan Ivanovitch suddenly became quiet. A mist clouded his brain. He leant gently on her, and then allowed himself to be dragged through the dark room into the ante-room.

He was so withered, as light as a plucked chicken, but he seemed unbearably heavy to the old woman. The flame of the candle in her hand swayed to and fro and threw both their shadows on to the wall like two colossal ghostly buffoons.

In the ante-room Polina Grigorievna tried to help him when he wanted to sit down. She put down the light and began to unbutton his shirt with her bony hands.

Ivan Ivanovitch realized how she loved him, and he was seized by a desire to fondle her, to say something affectionate, as he had not done for a long time, to cling to her—he, the lean old man to the old grey-haired woman.

He tried to pull himself together, to stand strong and powerfully on his feet, and to do everything for himself as he used to. And while Polina Grigorievna's hands were busied with his trembling form, he murmured :

"Leave go . . . I can . . . leave go." His trembling fingers groped for the buttons, but became entangled in her hands and got in her way. . . . A fresh wave of vexation surged over him.

"Let me, let me. . . . Now leave me alone, for God's

sake. . . . What have I done that you should torment me so ? " he faltered, nearly weeping.

" Oh God ! I only do it for your sake," escaped her. At length he sat down quietly, small and miserable.

Polina Grigorievna stood and waited, bending over him, her tired eyes fixed on the corner. It was so close all round her, as if there were nobody and nothing outside the walls of this stuffy little room, but eternal night and silence. And they two were alone in the whole world with their ceaseless sorrow.

Ivan Ivanovitch was ashamed that she should stand beside him. " Go away, please . . . what are you standing there for ? Go," he murmured.

Polina Grigorievna sighed heavily and stepped back so that he could not see her, prepared not to lose a moment in helping him if it should be necessary.

" I shall collapse in the end," she thought, " and who's to look after him then ? Lida has her own life and her own joys. . . . What's to happen ? . . . She will give up, they will both die and their misery pass all bounds. . . . But she is there, and she must put up with it. And He, from whom everything comes, will not reply by so much as a sound from His everlasting silence. But what will the end be ? " she asked herself, her eyes growing expressionless with horror.

Suddenly it was borne in upon her that everything comes to an end. Certainly it is painful at the time, but she will be able to get her proper rest to make up for that. She will be able to go for walks and pay visits, breathe freely and speak loudly. . . . How nice that will be. . . . If only it could be soon. . . .

Ivan Ivanovitch began to sway to and fro, and before she could reach him he hastily tried to rise so that she should not help him. He stretched out his hands for his clothes, but they evaded him, and before he could grasp them he fell heavily to the ground. He tried once more to rise ; but he had no strength and fell down. His outspread hands struck the floor loudly.

" Ivan Ivanovitch ! " cried the old woman shrilly, and hastened to lift him up. She seized him under the arms, and raised him, but her strength gave way and she was obliged to let him fall again. Ivan Ivanovitch saved himself

with his hands against the floor, felt for the leg of the table, slipped and murmured wretchedly :

" Nothing, nothing. . . . Leave me alone . . . at once.
. . . I can get up alone. . . . That's nothing."

Polina Grigorievna began to cry by fits and starts. The feeble sounds betrayed her terrible grief. She took his old head in both her hands, clasped him to her, fell on her knees beside him and caressed him.

Ivan Ivanovitch clung to her in silence.

The first bluish streaks of dawn stole through the crevices of the window. It was as if some bright spirit had come to this house at last, and looked through the chinks with sad, uncomprehending eyes.

CHAPTER XI

EVERYTHING in the courtyard was still wrapped in blue shadows, but in the fields beyond the far horizon was gradually brightening. The sky grew lighter and the stars melted away like transparent, silvery drops, ready to merge themselves in the triumphant azure when the golden sun should peer over the earth's frontiers.

Arbusoff's troika, which had left the other vehicles far behind, was still speeding over the dewy fields.

The faces of Dchenieff, Dr. Arnoldi and Arbusoff himself were grey and drawn after their sleepless night. The drunken merriment gradually passed away, they were all tired, and no one could really make out why they were tearing off to some factory or other instead of lying in their clean, warm beds, worn out as they were and shivering in the chill that heralds dawn.

Before and behind and on both sides of them the fields spread out in a huge circle, flying back incessantly. The corn, weighed down by dew, lay motionless on the ground, sunk into a wakeful, twilit sleep, grey beneath the liquid layer of mist. The endless forests looked blue in the distance, and already crows were flying, beating the air heavily with their wet wings while everything round them slept.

"Now then, are we nearly there?" asked Dchenieff crossly, looking out with tired eyes under the drooping brim of his white hat.

"Nearly, as soon as we get through the spinney by the river there . . . we've still about three miles . . ." the driver answered, turning his face towards him, tired and indifferent.

"The devil only knows why we came," said Dchenieff in a casual way, for it occurred to him that Arbusoff had planned this drive to worry him.

Dr. Arnoldi sat as silent as though he were hewn out of stone, his hands crossed on his stick, his heavy, powerful head shaking irregularly whenever the carriage jolted.

Arbusoff was silent too, and gazed steadily at the fields with his dark, blood-shot eyes.

But when the rosy light of morning streamed through the air and the fields grew whiter with dew and mist, when the wood, black before, looked quite blue, like one transparent line, and somewhere on the far distant horizon the spire of a little church glimmered like a golden star, Arbusoff suddenly laughed, threw his head back and cried boisterously :

"Now then, you devils, why are you so gloomy ? . . . Pavel, drive on, give them a taste of the whip . . . the side horses must gallop ! Make it hot for them." He turned to Dchenieff : "You artist . . . look, all this is mine ! . . . Here, as far as the eye can see. The forest, and the meadows and the Steppes—all mine . . . our soil—the Arbusoffs'!"

"Well, and what of it ?" answered Dchenieff contemptuously, feeling that Arbusoff was trying to offend him in some way.

"Yes, brother, paint pictures, stick to it. . . . Perhaps they'll raise a monument to you . . . but the soil is mine on which the monument will stand," Arbusoff continued tauntingly. "Everything's mine . . . except happiness." He had added that—unexpectedly to himself, perhaps, and then shouted angrily : "Pavel, stop ! Don't you see, you noodle, they're left behind . . . we must wait."

The troika stopped. The offended bells cried out in chorus, and it was a long time before they calmed down. A cloud of steam rose from the horses and shot up rose-coloured into the dawn. Two more vehicles emerged from the background. Shouts were audible and some one waved his cap, lit up by the first rays of the rising sun. The carriages flew up, raked up the ground and halted. Everyone began to talk loudly, shouting and laughing, and all traces of weariness vanished at once. The bright morning filled their souls with youthful freshness.

Only the red-haired priest, whose long curls hung down dankly, moaned wearily :

"No good at all, this drive. . . . My wife will be very anxious. . . . Heaven only knows what your idea is . . . nothing sensible, anyhow."

"What?" Arbusoff turned his burning gaze full upon him.

"I said it's no use, all this driving, and my wife . . ."

"Ah, your wife?" cried Arbusoff, angrily, the whites of his eyes growing blood-shot. "What the devil did you fasten on to us for then? . . . Your wife? . . . Well, get back to her! Go on, get out!"

The red-haired Father was startled and said, deeply hurt: "What's the matter? . . . I only mean . . ."

"Oh, you mean, do you?" cried Arbusoff spitefully, refusing to listen to anyone. "Now, be off with you . . . quick. Pavel, take him by the scruff of his neck!"

"Excuse me, but to treat a clergyman like this . . ."

"I tell you . . ." roared Arbusoff, lifting the whip.

The priest turned pale, looked round humbly and helplessly in every direction, crawled out of the carriage and remained standing by the side of the road.

"Drive on, Pavel," called Arbusoff.

"I say, what are you doing?" began Dchenieff angrily.

Arbusoff looked at him threateningly.

"Anyone who doesn't like it . . ." he began menacingly.

They were all silent. Dr. Arnoldi only glanced at Arbusoff and Dchenieff with his small clever eyes, and Naumoff shrugged his shoulders indifferently. The horses trotted on. The red-haired Father stood still by the roadside and looked on in perplexity while the troikas disappeared in the distance and were blurred in the sharp light of the rising sun.

He made a gesture of dismay and began to follow them. Then he stood still, took off his hat and passed his hand through his hair. He went backwards, then forwards again, then at last he dragged himself back along the old path, raising his cassock comically, and every now and then burying his head in his shoulders.

"What a scandal!" he sighed, quite brokenly. "My wife told me not to have anything to do with them . . . and she was quite right. . . . What a scandal!"

When the sun had been up quite a long time and was burning down in sparkling lights on the dew-washed roofs he came to a village which he had not even noticed the night before.

The little red-haired priest looked very sorry for himself.

The thick grey road-dust had settled on his drenched boots. His cassock was wet up to the knees, although he had held it up carefully all the way, as a girl holds her skirt. His beard hung down in tangles, his long hair fell over his forehead. A peasant-woman who was drawing water at a well, stood still and watched him.

"He is on a pilgrimage to the holy places, one can see," she thought, full of reverence. A group of peasants took off their caps.

Towards midday he arrived at the town in a peasant's cart, and went straight to bed, really ill from weariness and humiliation. By the evening the town was talking of nothing else but the latest Arbusoff scandal.

CHAPTER XII

IT was that exquisite hour before the heat begins, and the summer sun shines bright and clear with a springtime sweetness. The early morning played in the garden, gay, airy, stimulated by the light and the spicy, moist warmth.

The sick woman sat in an arm-chair at the wide-open window. A broad wave of light poured into the room with the clear air. She looked so pretty, with her pale face and dark eyes, in her white dress, with the white pillows behind her, as if she were adorned for a festival.

She felt well. The pains of the night had abated, and her weak frame felt refreshed by the soft morning warmth. The sun cast dancing spots on the clean floor, on the white pillows and the white walls, and even on a plait of hair which shone soft as silk, so that it seemed to be dipped in pure gold.

The sick woman moved her fingers gently, as though she were playing a melody which only she could hear, and which she was answering by a pale, tender smile, perhaps meant for other thoughts, perhaps only for the far blue sky, which stretched out before her. She longed to get up, to forget her illness and weakness, to put on some loose bright dress, and to run laughing into the depths of the green garden, where a thousand spots of light danced incessantly and moist shadows, already transparent, melted away. And it was strange that Dr. Arnoldi's heavy figure should play such a large part in this wish, which she tried to excuse with a gentle, apologetic smile.

Since she had come home to die here, the memories of her former exciting life had become fainter and more remote. Her little world dwindled imperceptibly. Her bed, her arm-chair by the window, and the doctor who regularly spent whole hours with her in silence, had filled her life and become as important for her as the stage, the noise, the conversations, the applause, and the intoxicating atmosphere of dances and restaurants had once been.

All this seemed a long time ago. It seemed to be further away than those distant years when she used to run through the garden, a schoolgirl in a brown frock, to do her home-lessons at this window, and stroll down the boulevard in the evening with some long-forgotten schoolboy.

Just as she had often been unable to recall what had happened after a successful performance with encores and compliments the evening before, or after a noisy supper when everything had seemed like one bright blur, so it now seemed impossible for her, ill, dying alone in the old house, to call up a clear picture of that former life. She had almost forgotten it.

Only now and again, on sad evenings when the dim twilight died in the garden, and the whisper of death sounded clearer in the cool of the quiet evening, did those memories come back.

Figures emerged from the surrounding darkness and bowed low, the lights blazed, scarcely audible outbursts of applause floated up, there was the sound of confused music . . . a black figure advanced noiselessly from the crowd of shadows and gave her a wreath. Certain details grew clearer in her memory as when she had almost fallen that time she went into the cardboard tent in Monna Vanna's red cloak; or perhaps a drive to the Neva islands, the sound of a breaking goblet, the obsequious smile of her old impresario who always tacked on to every sentence : "My dove . . ."—some movement, some word—all gone, dispersed like the airs of a puff of wind.

The thought seemed strange to her that so much brilliance, movement and passion could be swallowed up so soon and have nothing in common with what was happening on the threshold of approaching death. How hard it was to believe that this feeble body had once displayed its charms in shameless eager caresses and strutted about on the stage. It seemed hardly true, thought the sick woman. "It is as though some other grasping, voluptuous, shallow woman had rented my body and dragged it about on the stage and used it for her own ends. And now I can't think why she did so, and what pleasure she found in it. What was the use of so much sorrow, excitement, and surrender, when I see now at the last minute that it was only a mad

delirium, that what really matters surrounds me now—the pillows, the anguish, the torturing wishes, the quiet evenings at the window, the gloomy doctor, death. Perhaps it would have been worth while to live if this moment could unite all the brilliance and noise in one bewildering flash, to blaze up dazzlingly and carry one away without grief and pain, without one's knowing it."

"Do you know, Doctor," she had once said to the taciturn Arnoldi, "that was just my life. It was for that I was born and grew up, dreamt and struggled, changed from a girl to a woman, an actress. How much strength was spent on it. . . . And now all at once it is as though I were preparing for a journey, everything is ready packed, all the excitement over, I've arrived at the station, the train is just starting, and then I find I've forgotten some little thing, and that's just the most important, quite indispensable. . . . Ah! it's not even like that, as I'm telling you. It's much, much more terrible, and you won't understand me."

"Yes, I do, I do understand that," Dr. Arnoldi had answered, gently and wearily as ever.

The sick woman's lips parted in a quiet smile at the recollection of him. It seemed as though the laconic, morose doctor actually did understand her, and that this sympathy was the secret which she had missed all her life.

A joyful thought flashed through her mind. If only she were as young and cheerful as she used to be, she could awaken this sorrowful soul, send it into raptures, give it all the happiness that she had thrown away on so many worthless and shallow people. This unassuming provincial doctor did not even know how seductive and fascinating a woman could be and what delights she can bestow. His solitary life should blaze up in bright flames. How he would love her . . . and she was no longer sorry on her own account that she had lost her beauty and that her body could no longer dazzle, but only repel.

Too late. But the sick woman suddenly realized that even so she would forsake him, for a quiet life and a love without brilliance and display could never satisfy her. It was only now, with Death drawing nearer every minute, that she believed in what she would once have rejected with a scornful smile.

“ So I had to live as I did . . . strange. . . . I see clearly that it wasn’t the right sort of life. . . . But it was the only one for me, I suppose. Why, I wonder ? What a dreadful muddle ! ”

The sick woman held up her transparent hand to the light and looked at the pale pink that showed between the fingers.

“ Beautiful,” she said softly to herself.

But all around her breathed such brightness and joy, there was so much sunlight in the world, the blue sky quivered so passionately in its brilliance, and the green garden blossomed so splendidly, that it was impossible to let one’s thoughts dwell on the darkness of death.

It’s all over and nothing matters. It is good to feel the dear sun’s warmth, to see its golden rays sparkling on her finger-tips and its white radiance trembling on her dress. She still sees the sun and feels its warmth, still breathes the refreshing scents from the blossoming garden. She would like to catch every little ray of this sunshine, to remember every quivering spot of the shimmering sky, which seems alive with countless feathers of blue invisible wings. Then she looks forward to seeing Dr. Arnoldi for a long, long time yet, and is glad that he is coming that evening. They will sit here at the window, and she will tell him softly all that crosses her mind, and yet only the best and loveliest.

A carriage drove up to the house. The sick woman heard the crunch of wheels and listened. She heard a voice which seemed familiar, though she could not recollect at once whose it was :

“ Tell me, please, does Mme. Rasdolskaia live here ? . . . Maria Pavlovna ? ”

“ Yes,” Nelly answered from somewhere. Great excitement seized the sick woman at the sound of this voice calling her by her half-forgotten stage name. A thousand impossible thoughts came flocking from all directions. She sat up straight, supported on her weak hands, and stared at the door.

“ Who’s there ? ”

And when a tall figure appeared in the light doorway, in a closely fitting red dress, a large hat and high-heeled

white shoes, the sick woman uttered a soft cry, stretched out her pale hand and cried :

“ Genitchka.”

Black hair, black eyebrows and red lips were blurred into one bright flash, and quick as lightning, two supple arms enfolded the sick woman. Mingled with the smell of scent and travel-dust was the atmosphere of the stage and supper-parties ; music, laughter and pleasure. All that former life of bustling, gay beauty seemed to have come rushing into the room with this young woman.

“ And I wondered whoever it could be . . . ” said the invalid, weeping and laughing, and seizing Genitchka’s soft hands. “ I thought, but no, nonsense . . . but I never expected to see you . . . dear one, my Genitchka. How is it that you . . . ”

“ Very simple. I ought to be acting at Kasan, but I didn’t go. I am sick of being driven about from pillar to post. . . . Well, and what are you doing here ? ”

Genitchka hesitated slightly as she said this, and glanced quickly at the invalid’s face. She checked herself at once and resumed her former expression, beginning to chatter again gaily. But the sick woman had seen that one look : it pierced her heart, as if she had at last seen in those frightened eyes, as in a dark mirror, her real dead face. Neither the doctor’s opinion nor her own weakness and pain had spoken to her of death so clearly and so irrevocably as this rapid, horror-stricken glance, the fleeting convulsion of pity that crossed the red lips ; and, above all, the haste with which Genitchka averted her gaze and forced her voice to sound cheerful.

Yet once more the vision of death receded, melting away in the cheerful rays of life. The sick woman laughed again, asked Genitchka many questions, embraced her, and in her voice sounded those tender, velvet tones that had once fascinated men.

“ Now tell me about yourself. . . . Are you here for long ? . . . Stay with me for a little.”

In the cheerful talk that followed the very remembrance of her illness seemed to vanish ; they hardly knew themselves what they were talking about, and would not have been able to repeat any of their conversation

afterwards. In the sharp outlines of feminine vanity the talk was now of new hats, of fragments of roles, now of names and now of love, as if a heap of many-coloured paper flowers had been swept together untidily. Only once a shadow marred the brightness.

"And do you know, Petrov is dead . . ."

The good-natured, comical face of a fat old actor, who used to call all the girls "little daughter," rose up before them. It was too strange to think that this kindly, clever face should now be lying in the grave, the eyes closed for ever and the fat arms motionless.

But the shadow disappeared without a trace, like the reflection of some giant bird that flits across the sky.

The sun stood high above the garden and the shadows were small; the heat grew and lay dry over everything before Maria Pavlovna became restless.

"Genitchka, I'm sure you haven't had any breakfast? You must have some coffee at any rate. . . . I'm chattering so, and you've been travelling all night."

"It doesn't matter," answered Genitchka carelessly, raising her eyelids with their black lashes, which were in sharp contrast to the rosy young face. "We'll have coffee at once. I am going to manage here. Oh! how lovely it is!"

She thought it was all very beautiful after the tawdriness of the stage and the dust of the wings. The green garden, the blue sky and the sun made her happy as a girl. She forgot that Maria Pavlovna was at death's door, and might die to-morrow, if not to-day, and she dreamt of the happy way in which they would spend the summer.

"Where do you keep everything? . . . Wait, I'll do it . . . stay there now! have you any servants?" she said, flinging her gloves across the room on to the table, so that she could take off her hat with the large rose-coloured flowers.

She lifted both her arms. Like all actresses, Maria Pavlovna cast involuntarily a critical glance at Genitchka's rounded breast and slender waist, gracefully bent with the exertion.

"Lucky girl!" she thought, slightly enviously, and all at once she started. "Oh!"

"What's the matter?"

"My Pasha asked for a holiday to-day. . . . What are we to do now?"

"Never mind." And before the sick woman knew what was happening, Genitchka had thrown her hat on one side, gathered up her long red train, and run out of the door. Outside she began to laugh and sing to herself. Her gay voice was wafted across the courtyard and then lost in the garden.

Maria Pavlovna let her hands rest on her knees and relapsed into thought. Her head swam slightly. The sound of her voice and the laughter had exhausted and wearied her, though she did not know it. She looked up at the distant sky with wet eyes and plunged into its radiant blue. Her thoughts whirled round, capriciously as fallen petals snatched by the wind of spring.

Genitchka stayed out a long time. Now and then her ringing voice could be heard, now nearer, now further off; fragments of songs and the rattle of crockery, which she had found for herself, penetrated to the room, and then she could be heard talking to some one.

Maria Pavlovna listened and recognized Nelly's voice. She grew alarmed. The impetuous Genitchka would never understand poor Nelly, who hid away from people in the garden. She wondered anxiously if Genitchka would hurt her feelings by questions. But Nelly's voice sounded calm, Genitchka laughed as gaily as before, and Maria Pavlovna felt more at ease.

"Dear Genitchka," she thought with tears in her eyes, "she won't hurt anybody. There can't be anyone, however unhappy and embittered, who wouldn't be pleased to see her. . . ."

"Well, here we are again," cried Genitchka, as she came into the room once more with Nelly walking seriously behind her.

Genitchka carried a tea-tray with a coffee-pot, glasses and cream-jug, and Nelly obediently carried a basket of bread.

"We have made friends already," Genitchka explained, as though she were telling a long-desired piece of news.

Nelly put the basket on the table and sat down, her brows knitted and her delicate hands between her knees.

It was already the sixth month of her pregnancy, and it was strange to compare her full figure with the fragile, still quite girlish shoulders.

Genitchka dipped a piece of rusk in her coffee and said :

" What an awful pity that she isn't an actress . . . look at her face. Just right for Masha in 'The Three Sisters,' " and she quoted a line, laughing.

Maria Pavlovna looked at Nelly with a tender, pitying smile, thinking : " Really, what a sweet yet unhappy face she has."

Nelly sat upright, frowning as though concentrating her thoughts with an effort. Her thick hair lay round her head in a single plait like a curving snake, the delicate line of her lips was compressed, and weary grief looked out of her young face and made it as old as if she had her whole life behind her instead of nineteen years.

" Well, so I've arrived," Genitchka chatted on. . . . " But what sort of society have you got here ? Does no one come to see you, Masha ? "

" Nobody comes to see me," answered Maria Pavlovna with sad resignation, " except the doctor . . . Dr. Arnoldi. As a rule we are always alone, Nellitchka and I."

" Arnoldi ? " repeated Genitchka. " A pretty name ! . . . Go on. Is he young and interesting ? "

Maria Pavlovna laughed and a touching expression shone in her eyes.

" No, quite an old fellow, and not at all interesting . . . not in that sense. But just wait, and you'll see him. He visits me every day . . . always grumpy . . . but an awfully good, kind man. I've never met such a good man in all my life."

Genitchka cast a sly sidelong glance at Maria Pavlovna, who understood it and became as self-conscious as a girl. A slight blush overspread her pale cheeks, and tears came into her beautiful eyes dilated by illness.

" It's no use looking at me. . . . It's too late for me to think of that kind of thing." And she lifted her waxen hands and dropped them again, as though to prove what she said.

" There are a great many interesting people here," began

Nelly unexpectedly, as if she wished to change the subject or her own thoughts. "Dr. Arnoldi will introduce you to them, he knows every one here."

Maria Pavlovna looked at Nelly, startled. She knew, and so did Genitchka, to whom she referred. A rather cruel curiosity showed in Genitchka's face, and Maria Pavlovna stretched out her hand, as though to prevent further talk.

But Nelly knitted her fine brows still more narrowly and went on with a strained expression :

"Get him to introduce you to Serge Nicolaievitch . . . Dchenieff."

"Who's that ? "

Maria Pavlovna became very excited, and burning spots appeared on her cheeks.

"Why, Nelly . . . ? "

"Well, why not ? " replied Nelly coldly, looking gloomily in front of her. And turning suddenly direct to Genitchka, she said challengingly :

"That's a man I was in love with . . . you get to know him. It would interest me."

"What is there interesting in that ? "

"Oh, nothing."

Nelly said this in a vaguely threatening voice. Genitchka looked at her perplexed, then smiled contemptuously. Maria Pavlovna cast a glance at her black, glossy hair, at the strong, supple figure clearly defined under her red dress, and she thought : "Well, she needn't be afraid of anybody . . . poor, poor Nelly. . . ."

"It's nothing to laugh at . . . it would be an interesting experiment ! " remarked Nelly quite seriously.

Genitchka laughed again, got up, and stretched her arms with her hands clasped.

"How funny you are. It seems as if you wanted to make use of me . . . so of course I'm inquisitive. . . . Well, let me have a look at your Serge Nicolaievitch, though it's really absurd. . . . This is the first time you've seen me. . . ."

Nelly looked at her obstinately and silently with puckered brows. Genitchka stepped into the middle of the room, drawn up to her full height, and was about to say something more when the door was opened gently and the enormous,

heavy figure of Dr. Arnoldi appeared on the threshold. Genitchka stood still, open-mouthed.

"Ah, there's the doctor," cried Maria Pavlovna gladly, and looked at him with an affectionate smile.

"Come in, dear friend . . . just think what a pleasure for me—Genitchka has arrived. Come, let me introduce you, Dr. Arnoldi . . . Eugenia Samoilovna Usdalskaya. . . . You know Nelly, don't you ? "

Dr. Arnoldi greeted them and sat down. He looked more morose and withered than ever.

Conversation did not flow easily at first. Dr. Arnoldi looked attentively at the three women. Maria Pavlovna had a quiet smile, Nelly sat absorbed in her own thoughts and Eugenia Samoilovna had stepped to the window and sat down there. She was still somewhat excited, but hardly knew herself whether to be angry with Nelly ; her bosom rose and fell more quickly.

"Are you going to make a long stay ? " asked Dr. Arnoldi.

She looked at him and smiled ; she had taken a fancy to him.

"The whole summer, if Masha doesn't turn me out. . . . I am tired of the green-room ; besides, it's time I had a rest."

"Is that your family or your stage name ? "

"No, my own."

"Are you a Pole ? "

"On my father's side ; my mother was a Jewess," said Eugenia Samoilovna, and she laughed gaily.

The old doctor could not help smiling at her.

"Now, Doctor," said Maria Pavlovna, "you must see that my Genitchka isn't dull here. Do introduce her to your friends ; you have so many."

"Yes, I can certainly do that," agreed Dr. Arnoldi calmly, and he looked across again at Eugenia Samoilovna and repeated kindly :

"Yes, certainly . . . Eugenia Samoilovna ought to come and see us at the club, there are always a good many people."

"How can I go alone ? " asked Genitchka teasingly.

"Why should you go alone ? I will come and fetch you."

"I can go with you," said Nelly suddenly.

The doctor and Maria Pavlovna looked up at the same moment and exchanged glances of amazement.

"Oh, yes ! of course," Genitchka laughed loudly. " You want to make some experiments with me. . . . All right, you introduce me to the world."

"Yes," answered Nelly shortly, the hard expression in her face and voice remaining unsoftened.

"This is really curious," thought Eugenia Samoilovna, and looked haughtily at Nelly. The girl's face was inflexible, like the stone image of a single cruel, secret thought. Dr. Arnoldi looked first at one and then at the other, comparing them involuntarily.

Eugenia Samoilovna, imbued with light and movement, seemed to be hastening towards the unknown happiness which alluring life must surely have in store for her. As in a vision he saw her splendid body, all bright and changing. Nothing was hidden from him. Beside her Nelly looked pale and grey as the early morning. She sat straight up, her hands clasped tightly to her breast, as though to restrain something. Probably in the future her bitter grief would turn to inextinguishable hatred. Maria Pavlovna's smile of resigned sorrow shone like a candle lighted at the altar of destiny. Everything was at an end for her. Life had passed away from her already, and no doubt she realized that a passionate longing for it would be as useless as furious imprecations. She smiled sadly at the impetuous Genitchka, the severe Nelly and the gloomy old Dr. Arnoldi alike.

Eugenia Samoilovna could not sit still. She shook her head to chase away unpleasant thoughts and began to chat carelessly with the doctor and Maria Pavlovna. Even the melancholy doctor began to cheer up. Only Nelly sat silent, deep in thought. An imperceptible struggle convulsed the corners of her compressed lips. They had almost forgotten she was there when she suddenly began to talk, looking fixedly at Maria Pavlovna and Dr. Arnoldi.

"Why were you surprised at my wanting to go to the club with Eugenia Samoilovna ? Do you think I ought not to show myself ? "

This had occurred neither to the doctor nor to Maria Pavlovna, but for some reason they both looked embarrassed.

"No, why should we?" said Dr. Arnoldi.

"How can you say such a thing, Nelly?" cried Maria Pavlovna.

"Yes, that's what you thought," replied Nelly coldly. She got up and left the room. The others were silent for a long time.

"Heavens, how unhappy she is," said the invalid.

"And very odd. I suppose she's not quite normal," said Eugenia Samoilovna.

Dr. Arnoldi sighed heavily and got up.

"It's time for me to go. She's only unhappy. When people in her position, worried to death, are still normal or capable of reflection, they are either ruined characters or fools."

"But her Dchenieff shan't be forgiven," said Maria Pavlovna.

Dr. Arnoldi searched his old heart for a judgment and found none; he only shrugged his shoulders.

Eugenia Samoilovna replied instead:

"It's really funny, your opinion, Masha. She is not a child and ought to have known better. . . . It's her affair."

"Yes, but what is she to do now?"

"Oh, Masha . . . what indeed? Drown herself . . . if she hasn't the strength for anything else!"

"That's not so simple, Genitchka," replied the sick woman, gently reproachful.

Eugenia Samoilovna made no reply, but a passion that was cruel to all other women, while forgiving men everything, gleamed in her dark eyes. She seemed to be jealous, without knowing of whom, perhaps only because another young girl had met with love.

Dr. Arnoldi took his hat, and approached to take leave of Maria Pavlovna.

"I am going to see a patient in the country to-day. Good-bye till to-morrow!" and he added softly, so that Eugenia Samoilovna should not hear: "Tell Nelly that Arbusoff wants to see her to-day."

Maria Pavlovna looked at him in horror.

CHAPTER XIII

EUGENIA SAMOLOVNA went to the garden gate with the doctor. She walked slowly, and asked questions cheerfully, even playfully, about the interesting young people in the town and the amusements. When they were out of earshot of the house, Genitchka stood still and touched the doctor's coat-sleeve with a gesture of anxiety.

"Tell me, Doctor, how is Masha really?"

Dr. Arnoldi was silent for a while, seeming to reflect.

"It's a desperate case," he answered shortly.

"And there's no hope?"

"None." The word sounded harsh and sharp.

Eugenia Samoilovna clasped his hand, and there was terror in her beautiful expressive face.

And yet she did not seem quite to realize the terrible import of his words: it was hard for her overflowing spirits to grasp in a moment the nearness of death.

"And you're not making a mistake, Doctor?" she said in a plaintive voice, as though begging not to be alarmed. . . . "Really no hope? . . . Perhaps she will get better . . . she is still so young. . . . Just see how she laughs. . . . Her eyes are full of life still. . . . Consumptives sometimes live a long time. . . . I knew an artist . . ."

Dr. Arnoldi shook his head obstinately and said dully:

"She will hardly live a month."

He looked pityingly into her bright eyes, which hated to see suffering and death; they were round with terror, like those of a frightened cat.

Suddenly Dr. Arnoldi's features became almost distorted. It was as though the eternal mask of indifference had fallen, and a tortured human face appeared beneath it. His lips trembled as though he were making an effort to say something; he did not succeed. Then he gave a short jerk of the hand, turned away without saying good-bye, and went quickly through the gate. Eugenia Samoilovna stood rooted to the ground, looking after him with round, frightened eyes.

CHAPTER XIV

IN the twilight, when the sky had grown dark and the dust had settled down, Arbusoff's troika rolled up with much noise and tinkling of bells.

Maria Pavlovna was sitting alone at the window, looking up to where the tree-tops in the fading sky gradually took on darker hues.

Eugenia Samoilovna had gone for a walk to explore the little town. All day she had sat with the invalid, and now she felt the need of fresh air and cheerful people.

Arbusoff entered the courtyard, stepping firmly in his patent-leather boots. The red shirt, the unbuttoned coat and the white cap on the back of his head made him look like a hardy athlete. But his dark eyes were not cheerful.

Maria Pavlovna saw him come, but said nothing, only shaking her head. She did not know Arbusoff personally, but she guessed who it was.

Arbusoff knocked at the door of Nelly's room. She did not answer. All was quiet behind the door and intense silence surrounded him, growing almost tangible in the twilight ; sinister shadows crept out of the garden on to the flight of stairs.

Arbusoff knocked again. There was a slight movement behind the door, which ceased at once. He felt that Nelly not only knew who was knocking, but could actually see him through the closed door. A fit of fury seized him and he tried the door. It was not locked and opened easily.

Nelly was standing at the table. In spite of the darkness he could see the delicate eyebrows, and the white hands hanging down helplessly on her dress which melted into the gloom. She did not move ; she said nothing. She did not even lower her head, but looked straight at him.

"Nelly," he said hoarsely. "Nelly," he repeated.

Nelly looked at him in silence.

Arbusoff remained for a moment on the threshold.

Suddenly he threw his head back, his features were distorted to a ghastly smile, and he took a step into the room. Nelly started. Her face had grown quite white.

"How do you do. . . . Didn't you expect me ? . . . We haven't met for a long time. . . . What's this,—aren't you glad to see me ? "

Nelly was silent. Arbusoff laughed.

"Perhaps I've come at an inconvenient time ? . . . Tell me, and I'll go away. . . . I only wanted to see you. . . . What is it, is Dchenieff coming ? No ? . . . But I've come, you see . . . Nelly . . . it was very hard for me to make up my mind. I've been drinking every day without ceasing, but still I've come. . . . Too silly . . . sickening . . . but still, here I am. Why are you silent ? I don't want anything. It's not an insult to you that I should come, is it ? . . . I just felt as if I wanted to all at once. . . . Don't be afraid. I shan't talk about that. . . . What is there to say ? What is past is past. It only grieves me that you didn't come to me six months ago. Do you remember ? Forgotten, of course ! I remember everything. . . . But why are you silent ? Say something, won't you ? "

"I've nothing to say," replied Nelly softly.

Arbusoff gave another short laugh. He had determined on the way there not to speak of the past, not to reproach her or hurt her feelings. But the blind, drunken rage which all his acquaintances feared began to rise within him. At the sight of her dear eyes, so completely changed, her lips, her hair, her whole slender, supple body, Arbusoff imagined again, as vividly as he had done during those sleepless nights which he thought would have driven him mad, that another had held her in his arms ; and at the thought a mist of blood rushed to his brain.

"Well, of course, there's nothing much in that !" Suppressing with a superhuman effort the desire to strike her a blow in the face with all his strength, he said through his clenched teeth : "Quite a simple affair. . . . It is so simple with women : to-day she kisses one, to-morrow she sleeps with somebody else. . . . Trifles. . . . But what I . . . well, it hurts me. . . . But what does it matter to you. . . ."

Arbusoff no longer knew what he was saying. He only

felt horribly that he was slipping down a precipice. And at the same time he felt a burning desire to revile and humiliate her. He spoke very slowly, as though he were seeking appropriate words, and were sorry not to be able to find still coarser and more degrading ones.

"Ah! . . . Well, and how was it? How are things getting on with you two? Did you please him very much? . . . Was he satisfied? Forsook you rather too soon, though. I suppose you're not such a wonderful mistress, after all. . . . Perhaps I've tormented myself for nothing. It's not worth while! . . . I shall have to find out from him. . . . That would be interesting, wouldn't it?"

Nelly was silent. There was something so terrible in this derision that she could neither reply nor defend herself, standing there silent and motionless, her delicate white hands hanging helplessly.

"You are silent?" continued Arbusoff hoarsely, his hatred almost choking him. "Well, be quiet then. And really what is there to say? You can be quiet, but I'm going to talk. . . . I've stood it long enough in silence. Now I can talk, I suppose?"

Nelly was silent.

"Yes," said Arbusoff slowly, "I have heard that you are to be congratulated. . . . Should one congratulate? . . . Come, tell me!"

Nelly made no reply.

Arbusoff paused for a minute or two. A red mist rose before his eyes, he could scarcely breathe, his hands were clenched, as for a blow. It seemed as though he could not endure it a moment longer without something happening. Then he saw that Nelly was crying.

She stood drawn up to her full height, a tall, pale figure, her hands hanging listlessly, her face strangely intense. Tears were rolling quietly down her cheeks.

Everything grew dark before Arbusoff's eyes, his heart contracted, he forgot everything, felt neither hatred nor jealousy nor bitterness; reeling like a drunken man he took two steps forward, stretched out his hands and fell heavily on his knees. In that moment he had forgiven everything, and saw only the unhappy girl whom he had loved, insulted by everyone and abused even by himself.

"Nelly," he cried hoarsely, pressing his burning lips on her hand. "Forgive me, I am mad . . . forgive me!"

Nelly did not tear herself away, or shake him off; only her lips began to tremble. She had raised her eyes and was looking straight before her, with a helpless expression of grief, terror and an inexplicable ecstasy.

"I can't go on . . ." murmured Arbusoff. "Forgive me . . . have pity."

Nelly was silent.

Arbusoff rose to his feet. His face was pale, a black lock of hair hung down over his forehead, his drunken eyes were full of grief.

"Perhaps we can forget it. . . . Nothing has happened. . . . Everything is as it was . . . Nelly?" he said despairingly.

Suddenly Nelly lifted both hands to her brow, twining her fingers together.

"Why all this . . . my God, why?" she said, so softly that Arbusoff could scarcely hear.

"Listen, Nelly," he began earnestly. "I can't live without you . . . hate me, despise me, but . . . I cannot. You understand, cannot. I thought I should forget you. Drank. Did the vilest things. Lived disgustingly. . . . Like a swine. . . . Others had to pay for you. . . . I took them with money, I took them with violence. How many lives I have ruined! All for nothing. . . . All in vain. . . . I'm come back to you. What does it mean? Perhaps I'm mad. . . . I can't. . . . I'll forget everything . . . forgive everything, only . . ."

"That is impossible!" answered Nelly slowly.

"Why? You don't believe I shall forget it? . . . I will. Look here how I press my heart. I shall forget it. . . . I shall love you, fondle you like a child. . . . My Nelly . . . my love. Or do you care for him still?"

Nelly started, her lips moved convulsively.

"No," she replied, and repeated almost maliciously: "No!"

"Truly?" cried Arbusoff joyfully. "I know you never lie. . . . Truly? . . . Well, what now? . . . Let us go. . . . Nelly. . . . Come with me."

"No," answered Nelly huskily.

" Well, why not ? Don't you love me ? . . . Then we'll be friends and spend the rest of our lives together. . . . Look here, you don't know your heart. You'll be ruined at this rate, but I will take care of you. . . . "

" It will never be," answered Nelly.

" But why ? . . . Why make such difficulties ? . . . What do you want ? . . . Perhaps you'd like me to send a bullet through my head. . . . This is driving me to death. . . . "

Suddenly Nelly gave a short, spiteful laugh.

" You couldn't have said anything more foolish than that . . . You don't seem to be beginning at the right end."

Arbusoff started back. He thought he could not have heard correctly, or must have misunderstood her.

" What do you mean ? "

Nelly went on laughing softly and enigmatically.

Arbusoff took a step forward, put his heavy head close to her face and fixed his gaze on the pupils of her eyes, which did not flinch for a moment. Unfathomable, gliding movements circled in their depths, as though a writhing snake were slipping over the edge of a precipice.

" Now then, finish. Now ? . . . " he murmured hoarsely.

Nelly's laughter rang out again ; she pushed him away, went to the window and sat down. The corners of her compressed lips trembled and her eyes laughed.

" I want nothing ! . . . Leave me in peace. . . . I do no harm to any one."

Arbusoff remained standing, his head sunk, his strong arms hanging down helplessly.

" Listen, Nelly," he began again, looking away, " this is nothing to joke about. . . . I understand. . . . Perhaps one really ought to bash his head in on the spot, and then one's own. But what would be the good of that ? . . . It's all the same, that wouldn't improve matters . . . and then perhaps you'd hate me."

Nelly was silent.

Arbusoff moved clumsily towards her and fell on his knees again, his big curly head against her skirt, like a child. He could feel her warm, soft knee tremble under the harsh material. Several minutes had passed when a

tender hand began fondly to stroke his tangled, stubborn hair.

"My poor, dear, good friend," . . . whispered Nelly softly, as though she were rocking him to sleep, and her sad, caressing whisper sounded strange, scarcely audible in the dark and quiet of the evening.

She looked over his head with wide open eyes and again the tears coursed down her pale cheeks.

"Beloved!"

Arbusoff quickly raised his head. Tears of unending pity and love poured from his heart, and at the same moment his lips were pressed against hers. There were vague sounds all round him, the walls seemed to move, the ground swam away beneath his feet. All there had been before, jealousy, grief, hatred, had disappeared, and all that remained was the woman's sweet, helpless body, yielding softly to his embrace.

"My love, my darling, my beloved," whispered Arbusoff, kissing her burning lips, her wet cheeks and eyes, her hair, her breast.

"So you love me? . . . Love me? . . . You will forgive? . . . Everything? . . ." Incoherently, almost deliriously, Nelly spoke and clung to him.

Suddenly Arbusoff was seized by a feeling of such repulsion that he recoiled. He tried to force himself to embrace her more violently than before, to clasp her to himself till he hurt her, to strangle her and his disgust in these embraces; he could not do it.

Nelly, who had let her arms drop from his neck, looked at him with blissful, trusting eyes, and her whole heart went out to him. Arbusoff raised his hands to his head. Then a pallor blanched her cheeks. She understood. A proud expression came into her eyes and she stood up slowly.

"Go away," she said coldly.

In a mad fit of despair, feeling as if the very ground beneath his feet were giving way, Arbusoff rushed to her, trying to embrace her by main force.

"Nelly, forgive me. . . . I can't forget all at once. . . . You must realize that . . . Nelly."

"No, that can never be forgiven, Sachar Maximitch. . . .

You are not one of such men. . . . Go away, leave me in peace. . . . You are only torturing me . . ." she cried desperately.

"Never!" Arbusoff's voice rang through the house.

"Oh! leave me . . ." replied Nelly, smiling. "They all say that."

"I'm not like that."

"And you're not like them all? . . . I thought so myself once; now I see that I was wrong. . . . What do you want of me? . . . You want me to be your mistress? . . . All right, take me. Take me, then. At once. Oh, my God! only to die sooner."

Arbusoff tried to say something, but his voice failed. Suddenly he realized that everything was at an end for ever.

Nelly waited. Perhaps at that moment one single word, one little caress would have been enough to melt her sick, bitter heart in undying love for him. But Arbusoff was silent. And Nelly could hear that he was sobbing.

He was sitting at the window in the place she had left, his head in his hands. Hoarse and harsh as barking was this strange weeping. Nelly rushed madly towards him, but stopped suddenly, clasping her hands convulsively.

"Oh! do stop!" she cried in despair. "Aren't you ashamed of yourself? . . . Never before have I . . . You, Arbusoff, are weeping because a woman loves another!"

"What?" repeated Arbusoff mechanically.

A desperate idea flashed into Nelly's mind.

"Yes, loves . . ." she was silent for a moment, as though gathering all her strength, then finished with calculated cruelty: "Loves—in spite of all, loves. Listen. I lied to you that I no longer loved him. Do you hear? I love him. . . . Hate him and love him. . . . Love him alone. . . . But you . . . are ridiculous. . . . Do you hear? —ridiculous. He took all I had and cast it aside . . . that is a man. . . . But you can cry like a woman. . . . I love him, do you hear, love him. . . . If he liked, I would crawl on my knees from you to him . . . like a dog. . . . Now do you understand?"

A strong hand clutched her throat. Red circles floated before her darkened eyes.

"Ah . . ." Arbusoff uttered hoarsely, "if you can still jeer . . . I will kill you. . . . Damn you!"

Nelly did not resist. Her dark hair fell round her and her delicate shoulders were bent back like a fragile reed, trying to keep her balance. Her face was blue, her eyes starting from their sockets, her clenched teeth gleaming in the darkness. She gasped by fits and starts.

Suddenly Arbusoff flung her violently to one side. She struck the edge of the table, grasped the cloth, slipped and fell to the ground, pulling everything with her from the table.

Arbusoff was beside her at once.

"Nelly!" he shouted, thinking he had killed her.

Nelly raised herself slightly and sat down quietly, at the same time mechanically straightening her hair. She said something, but so softly that Arbusoff could not understand.

"What? . . . Nelly, forgive me, forgive me. . . . I've gone mad . . ." he murmured tearfully, trying to lift her up.

"A pity you didn't strangle me." Nelly laughed bitterly.

He put his hands to his head and then rushed from the room.

"Soria!" she cried despairingly, rising to her knees.

But Arbusoff did not hear.

CHAPTER XV

THE troika was waiting for him, but he did not see it. He staggered past, his head buried in his hands. He knocked against a post on the footpath, making his knee bleed without noticing it. Some one called to him :

“ Sachar Maximitch ! . . . Where are you going ? . . . Where’s your hat ? . . . What has happened ? ”

Arbusoff, looking up, recognized the white riding-jacket and the long grey coat of Cornet Krause and laughed wildly.

“ What’s the matter with you ? ” asked the cornet gravely.

“ Nothing, my friend. . . . One doesn’t need a cap. . . . It appears that one can even go through life without a heart, so what’s the good of a cap ? ”

Cornet Krause listened gravely and attentively.

“ Come home with me,” he said.

Arbusoff laughed again.

“ Do you think I’m taking leave of my senses ? . . . No, brother, people like myself never do that, that’s the worst of it. We brutes put up with everything, endure everything, but. . . . Well, let’s go, shall we ? Have you any vodka ? ”

“ I have some wine,” said Cornet Krause, looking at Arbusoff closely.

“ What’s the use of wine ! I want vodka.”

“ You shall have vodka,” agreed the cornet.

“ Well, then, let’s go.”

“ You have your horses here,” said Krause ; “ they must be sent home.”

“ The horses ? Oh ! let them go to the devil.” Arbusoff made an impatient gesture.

“ No, that would be wrong,” answered the cornet. He stepped up to the troika and ordered the coachman to drive home through a different street. Then he went back to Arbusoff.

Arbusoff was resting his forehead against the fence beside which he was standing.

"Ready, we can go now." Krause touched him on the shoulder.

"Ah . . . yes, so we can, so we can," replied Arbusoff, and suddenly he went on with a vague smile . . . "Ah, yes, I almost killed some one just now."

Cornet Krause listened carefully.

"Good. Tell me afterwards. You didn't do it, anyway." He took hold of Arbusoff's arm and the latter followed obediently, stumbling at every step.

"Here is a post, don't hurt yourself. . . . Now this way. We shall be there in a minute. . . . It's not much further. . . ." The cornet opened a wicket-gate, pushed Arbusoff in and then followed him.

It was quite dark in the hall of the wing in which Cornet Krause lived. There was a smell of turnip-soup and damp military coats. The cornet groped his way to the door, found matches, lit a lamp and went back to the hall again, throwing off his coat on the way.

"Sachartchenko," he called ; then spoke at some length in a whisper.

"I hear, your honour,¹ I understand," replied a soldier's voice.

Krause came back.

"We shall have some vodka in a minute," he said.

Arbusoff was standing in the middle of the room, on the very spot where the Cornet had left him, staring at the floor. Krause considered a moment, then took him by the shoulders and sat him down at the table. Arbusoff took a seat obediently. He looked round the room with an odd, curious smile, as though he saw it for the first time.

"You have got a nice room," he said good-humouredly.

"Yes, I've not arranged it so badly," agreed the cornet. "I like to be comfortable."

The room was large, almost too large for one person. The bed stood behind a tall screen ; there was a wide Turkish divan against the wall, a broad, well-appointed writing-table ; there was a rocking-chair, a wolf-skin on the floor and some tapestry on the wall above the divan. On this hung a

¹ Official title given to Russian officers by their subordinates.

semicircle of curved swords, guns and revolvers; the nickelled parts of these reflected their surroundings. A music-stand was in one corner and the curiously extended neck of a 'cello emerged from its case. There was a smell of scent and tobacco.

The orderly came back, bringing vodka, wine-glasses and plates with salted entrées, put everything on the table and went away.

"The samovar will be here in a minute," said Cornet Krause.

"The samovar? Oh! that's all rubbish. Let's drink instead . . . here's the vodka." Arbusoff poured some out and drank it.

Krause did not touch his wine-glass. Arbusoff drank again and again.

"I say, cornet, do you believe in love?" he asked suddenly.

"I have never been in love and therefore I can't say anything about it with certainty."

"Never loved? Well, you have had luck. . . . But, as an abstraction. Do you believe in it?—admit it?"

"Of course I cannot deny the existence of the sentiment," said Cornet Krause. "It's most likely a question of a very acute psychological process," he added thoughtfully, after some meditation.

"But I have loved, brother. . . . Do drink."

"Well, let's drink. . . . I know you are very unhappy," remarked Krause.

Arbusoff looked at him superciliously.

"You know that? . . . Well, all right . . . but is it likely that I, Arbusoff, should be unhappy? That's all rot, Krause . . . it'll pass; there, let's drink, it'll pass."

"Anyone can be unhappy," replied the cornet condescendingly. "Even if you are Arbusoff, and a rich man, you can suffer just as much as anybody else. And drinking vodka won't do you any good."

"You think everyone is unhappy? . . . Can that be true? . . . Is nobody happy? What about those who have everything they want. . . . Talent and success and . . . yes, and they need only whistle for the woman they love to crawl on her knees to them. . . ."

"That's not happiness. I believe that talent brings more sorrow than happiness. Success is relative, and a woman cannot fill a life completely."

"But she did fill mine—that's just it."

"It only seems so to you. For you have been spoilt from childhood and absolutely idle. You are accustomed to have all your wishes fulfilled, and if you don't get what you want you think all is lost and that all your happiness depends on that one woman. But that only seems so. If this woman really loved you she would be nothing to you, perhaps even worry you."

Arbusoff listened with bowed head, a lock of black hair still hanging over his forehead.

"I certainly haven't loved as you have, but I have thought a great deal about life and love, and finally I have come to the conclusion . . ."

Suddenly Arbusoff laughed.

"Oh, you German!¹ How pedantic you are . . . you've reflected, come to the conclusion, added and subtracted. . . . Now what's the result? Reflection is of no use to you here. No meditation and no subtraction, unless you want to subtract yourself. . . . But do you know what love is?"

"I have already told you . . ." said Cornet Krause, in self-defence.

"Stop, wait a minute." Arbusoff seized his hand and drew him across to where he was sitting. "I will tell you. Love, my friend, is when you lose your reason, when your heart is in pain—look, when it burns here. . . . When you are jealous and full of hatred and contempt and yet cannot live without her. If you should ever love, she will be all the world to you. . . . You will stand for nights together under her window, kiss her feet, forgive everything, endure everything. At night you weep, perhaps because the woman frowned or was unkind to you, then you sing and laugh because she kissed you at parting. You will drink, loiter about, give way to all kinds of excesses and then wash yourself and comb your hair and go to her quietly and look into her eyes like a dog. You will clutch her by the throat, but not strangle her, you will beat her and torture her, and

¹ The descendants of German families, or those of the Baltic provinces, are usually considered as Germans by Russians of pure blood.

then weep for pity. You will kiss every spot that you hurt, then . . .”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about. That’s madness,” said the cornet, in disgust.

Arbusoff grasped his hand more firmly.

“Oh, you miserable fool of a German! That’s just where the happiness lies, in madness. . . . If one could go out of one’s mind altogether and cut oneself to pieces—while she laughed and clapped her hands.”

“Where does the happiness come in? That is agony.”

“Yes, and is there no delight in pain? You don’t understand anything! Reflect, brother, come to conclusions. . . . But you’ll understand nothing all the same. But when you stand in some dark corner and she hurries past you, wrapped in a shawl, to another. . . . You see through walls. . . . And still you stand there, and the courtyard grows light and she strides past you again like a shadow. . . . Drink, Krause,” cried Arbusoff suddenly.

He talked wildly, and it was difficult to make sense of the confused words.

“One may drink . . .” said the cornet. “But what you have been saying is gruesome. And I don’t understand how anyone can survive it.”

Arbusoff laughed gaily.

“Oh, you don’t understand it? . . . I don’t either. I understand nothing, my dear old German. . . . But there, you see I have survived.”

“Have you, really . . .?”

Arbusoff fixed his heavy drunken gaze on him.

“Yes,” he answered curtly, then shouted: “Drink, my friend . . . drink!”

Krause poured out some more and they both drank. Arbusoff relapsed into thought, his head supported in his hands. The tall Krause sat silent and observed him closely.

“Yes,” began Arbusoff slowly, coming to himself again. “It’s not a question of mathematics, Krause. . . . Happiness and pity and life—nothing to do with mathematics. . . . People will never, never reduce everything to one denominator. . . . Consequently. . . . Stop, wait a second. I seem to be dead drunk. . . . I’ve been drinking for three days. . . . Now let’s go on with it!”

"We can do that," agreed Krause, filling the glasses.

"Listen, Krause," began Arbusoff slowly and emphatically. "Supposing I had killed some one."

"It would be a murder," explained Cornet Krause.

Arbusoff laughed.

"Right you are! . . . I say, you are a clever German. Of course—only a murder. Nothing more. . . . Now a dinner, now a murder. There's nothing in that to worry oneself to death about. A murder and no more. Once I killed a dog, shot it with a revolver . . . and I couldn't sleep for a long time afterwards. I gradually forgot it, but suddenly, in the middle of the night, it all came back to me, how it had turned over again in the snow and how its legs trembled. After that I forgot it all. . . . And I even remember describing my feelings with pleasure once or twice. . . . Even felt a kind of pride: yes, I have killed, that's nothing. . . . Look, what a hard man! . . . Just the same with hunting . . . it's unpleasant to wring a bird's neck while it's still alive, but you just do it and then forget it. All nonsense, Krause. . . . You've killed, and that's the end of it. Is a human being any better than a dog, Krause?"

"I don't know . . . I don't think so."

"Nor do I. . . . Perhaps I shall commit a murder yet, but whom I shall murder I don't know; her, him, or myself. . . . What do you think?"

"The most sensible course, in my opinion, would be to murder—him," said the cornet after some consideration.

"Bravo! That's it—the most sensible! . . . But if one loves him too, Krause?"

"Then her . . . or oneself."

"Well now, which is it to be?" asked Arbusoff persistently.

"I think oneself."

"Why?"

"If you kill her, you will suffer for it all your life."

"True, could I ever forget how she would look at me at the last moment? How small, how weak she would seem. . . . But I should have killed her! No, then better oneself, Krause."

"Yes, perhaps that would be better."

" Well, and if I kill myself . . . won't my last thought be that she might go to him over my grave ? I shall be lying in the earth, but she will be looking forward to something very wonderful. I remember, Krause, I was about twenty . . . and I had a sweetheart, a young girl. An officer, a suicide, had just been buried in our churchyard. And I went with her to the churchyard at night and on his grave . . . there was a marble stone with a sad inscription. I tormented her in every way I could think of. . . . And beneath us there lay a dead man. She cried, frightened of the grave. She was very religious . . . but that only made me more brutal. I tremble now when I think of that night and her rosy body on the cold white gravestone. . . . She wept but dared not resist. . . . She loved me, that's true."

" That's horrible," said Krause.

" There's nothing horrible in the world. . . . All rot. . . . What does it matter to the dead man ? He is nailed up, brother. What is terror, what is sin, when you come to die ? I remember when my father died. . . . He lies on the table, his face dignified and serious, his grey beard turning upwards. . . . I stand and look at him and weep. I was very fond of my father. The nun reads, the candles flicker. . . . It is night. And all at once I wonder what would happen if I pulled his nose ? . . . Horror overwhelms me. I feel my feet giving way and my fingers stiffening. Something dreadful must be going to happen. The dead man in his shroud will rise and curse me, the heavens quake. . . . And yet my hand is pushed forward, my heart stands still, cold sweat pours down my forehead . . . but my hand is stretched out. . . . Shall I pull . . . no. . . . Shall I ? . . . I pulled ! "

" Well, and what then ? " asked Cornet Krause curiously.

" His nose was cold," replied Arbusoff wearily, and was silent.

Krause, too, was silent for some time. Suddenly he burst out laughing. Arbusoff looked at him in amazement.

" What is the matter ? "

But Krause only laughed the louder and more heartily. His long face was crumpled up, his thin Mephistophelian brow contracted, his mouth seemed to extend to his ears. Arbusoff began to feel uncomfortable.

"Stop," he said. "Stop, I say. . . ."

But Krause did not hear. He jumped up, began to run up and down the room, stooping and bending his knees. His whole body shook with laughter.

"I say, what is the matter?" cried Arbusoff, himself bursting into a fit of drunken laughter.

"Oh, oh, oh . . ." shouted Krause. He was quite white, coughing, panting and waving his hands.

Arbusoff was filled with alarm. He suddenly thought that it could not be Krause over there.

"Now then, do be quiet," he shouted at the cornet. "I shall kill you!"

Krause was quiet in a moment, his face resumed its normal length, he raised his slanting eyebrows with dignity and said quite calmly :

"Perhaps we might have another drink?"

Now it was Arbusoff's turn to look at him curiously.

"Well, you confounded German!" he said.

There was a silence. The lamp burned dimly on the table. The table-cloth, stained with vodka, was reminiscent of a public-house; the weapons on the tapestry glimmered faintly. Night stood watchful behind the walls and in graceful humility the limpid moon shone in the sky.

CHAPTER XVI

KRAUSE was awakened by his orderly early in the morning. Arbusoff slept on the sofa in the same room in which they had been drinking the night before ; the dirty plates, glasses and dishes were still on the table. The air was close, and smelt of vodka. Arbusoff lay in his clothes, face downwards, with one arm curved outward curiously, hanging to the ground as though it were broken. Through the cracks of the shutters streamed a golden shaft of sunlight and a rainbow-coloured pillar of dust danced gaily in the dark room. A narrow golden bar fell slanting across the table and a white star glittered on the edge of a broken glass.

Krause dressed quietly in order not to wake his guest, put on a clean riding-coat, and a silver sash, buckled on his Tcherkessen-sword, which made him look so smart and good-looking that the impression he made was almost too splendid.

It was very early. The sun was still low, and dewy blue shadows lay on fences and trees. Nearly all the shutters were closed, and in the streets there were only women with baskets and jugs going to market. From the centre of the town came at intervals the sound of a single church-bell ringing for early service.

Krause's roan mare shone like polished gold in the sun. An orderly rode behind him and the two enormously long shadows, entangled in the horses' huge legs, crept along the dusty road with them. Everything was vivid and fresh in their morning tints. They were drilling outside the town on the broad dusty high road. Two foot-soldiers stood by a low barrier; straw dummies for the fencing-practice were placed all along the road, their disjointed arms flung out like scare-crows' on a vegetable-bed. The drilling had begun, the soldiers were riding in circles one behind the other, the horses were shaking their heads and tossing their tails.

The Staff Cavalry Captain Trenieff nodded to Krause.

"Lovely weather," he said, looking furiously at the soldiers, and he rode into the middle of the circle. "Left turn in circles," he called shortly.

And suddenly all the horses reared gracefully at the same time, turned round and galloped the opposite way, still in circles and still tossing their heads and tails.

"Left turn in circles!"

And once more there was a short dance on the spot and the circle moved symmetrically in the opposite direction, as though each horse were bound to the tail of the one in front.

The sun rose higher. Women in red shawls and groups of street-boys were sitting under the willows at the edge of the road. They looked at the soldiers and laughed.

Then the barrier was placed in the middle of the road and a long chain of soldiers diverged. Krause cantered to the right flank.

Trenieff's sharp commands were heard in the distance. And against Krause's will his horse started, reared, and at once the distance between himself and the barrier began to decrease. Something flew past like lightning underneath him, his heart beat faster and the long bar of the barrier was left behind.

Krause turned the horse round, put it into a trot and rode up to Trenieff. On the other side sat the bearded sergeant-major on a fat old horse, looking angrily at the soldiers.

Somebody left the right flank of the file, a young soldier with a flaxen moustache. His horse's hoofs moved more lightly and quickly. Lumps of dry earth flew across to Krause, a white shirt glimmered, a roan horse with its fore-legs drawn up and its hind-legs outstretched. One soldier after the other separated from the motionless file, and made for the barrier with the same strained, sharp expression, the horses leapt lightly through the air and ranged themselves again in the distance after they had left the barrier behind.

One soldier on a small chestnut horse rode up to the barrier, but almost at the same moment the horse began to break away to the side.

"Back!" shouted Trenieff.

The soldier rode back. The women laughed. The horse trotted on again, after marking time in its place. Already it seemed to be flying like the wind to the other side when it made a false step, became restless and broke off along the barrier with the same short jumps. The bar fell, and Krause saw the soldier's terrified face. The boys under the willows shrieked with delight.

"Fool!" shouted Trenieff. He looked sharply at the sergeant-major.

The bearded sergeant-major pulled the reins and rode after the soldier.

In the distance Krause saw the soldier's pale face, saw how his lower jaw quivered, and saw how the horse jumped unsteadily for the third time, saw how it laid its ears back, and then just before the barrier flung the soldier into the air, saw for a moment a white gleaming figure and the soldier's outstretched feet, and immediately afterwards a shapeless mass fell to the ground in a cloud of dust.

Tall Krause, Trenieff and the sergeant-major rode up. The soldier had raised himself, supporting himself on his hands. His back looked strangely bent and he fell on his side, only his legs quivering like a wounded bird's. He was lifted up and carried away, while the horse, which till then had been kicking wildly with its hoofs, suddenly raised itself on its hind-legs, tossed its mane several times and jumped up, trembling all over.

"What did I tell you?" shouted Trenieff furiously.

"The chief reason, your honour," the sergeant-major tried to make excuses, "was that something got caught. I examined it myself beforehand. . . . Felt it with my finger. . . . But now. . . ."

Krause went to the barrier, meaning to see whether the bar was firm, but instead he went further out into the field. The far horizon shimmered airily blue, and now all this splendour seemed a cruel irony. In the sun, hiding the light blue sky and the melting horizon from his eyes, he saw the red, mutilated head with the terrified eyes and the flowing blood, and the helpless unwieldy movement with which the unfortunate soldier had tried to rise, only to fall again.

CHAPTER XVII

TRENIEFF came home in a furious temper.

He sprang from his horse at the gate, gave it to the orderly and walked across the courtyard. The man-servant who took his sword in the hall announced :

“ Your honour, there are . . .”

“ Who ? ”

“ Your honour, the Staff Cavalry Captain Augustoff and Lieutenant Totski are waiting.”

Trenieff frowned. Like all his brother-officers, he detested Adjutant Augustoff, and found his handsome, impudent face with the prominent chin repugnant.

The adjutant, the lieutenant and Trenieff's wife were sitting in the drawing-room. In the hall Trenieff could hear his wife's silly, coquettish laughter and the adjutant's cold, almost offensively, polite voice.

“ Ah, there you are. . . . We have been waiting for you.” The adjutant approached him.

“ You're late to-day,” said his wife, smiling.

“ Have you come on business, or just to see me ? ” asked Trenieff, with assumed friendliness, without answering his wife.

They had quarrelled that morning, and Trenieff knew that she was only friendly before strangers ; after their departure there would be a senseless continuation of the morning's dispute.

“ On business,” replied the adjutant, with a slight bow.
“ One moment.”

Trenieff showed them into his own room with a gesture.

When the door was shut, Lieutenant Totski sat down at the table and began to twirl his moustache with an expression of self-importance ill-suited to his usual appearance of a silly schoolboy. Trenieff also sat down. The adjutant paced from one corner of the room to another.

“ Listen, Stepan Trofimovitch,” he said, coldly and evenly,

as if he were giving a regimental command. " You remember that affair with Arbusoff at the club."

" I was there," said Trenieff.

" Well," continued the adjutant, " the next day I went away on business, as you know; but of course you understand that one can't allow that sort of thing to pass, and if a duel should be considered necessary I am sure you won't refuse to place yourself at my disposal as a second."

Trenieff was silent. He looked malevolently at the adjutant's patent-leather boots, and thought that Arbusoff had not exceeded his rights in striking that cold, arrogant face with his nagaika.

" The lieutenant here has also consented to perform this friendly office," continued the adjutant as coldly as before. " You will do me the honour of riding to M. Arbusoff, to take him my challenge."

Trenieff bowed silently.

" It is my desire that the duel should be carried out thoroughly, and I request you to make all the necessary preparations."

Again Trenieff silently nodded his head.

" What I think is this," began Lieutenant Totaki pompously. " If you're going to shoot, then shoot, otherwise what's the good . . . child's play."

The blood rose to his face, he puffed himself up and twirled his moustache, very fair by contrast with his red face.

The adjutant listened with cold, polite attention.

" Quite my own opinion," he said.

The lieutenant pumped up still more blood, and looked round threateningly with his small eyes.

Trenieff glanced at him morosely, thinking what a fool he was.

The adjutant remained standing in front of Trenieff, moving from one powerful foot to the other, and began :

" As you know, Stepan Trofimovitch, I have the greatest esteem for you, and on that account of course it would give me the greatest pleasure to hear your views. Am I right in demanding satisfaction ? "

Trenieff would have liked to reply that he was a blackguard and a rascal, with no right to any satisfaction whatever. He remembered all the low, repulsive affairs with

women in which the adjutant had been mixed up. But Trenieff could no more do that than anything else he wanted to : he served in the army although he did not care for it ; he lived with a woman who bored him ; he did not restrain his fellow-officers from flogging the privates, and he never told others what he thought. All his life he had suffered from this lack of a straightforward will and now, too, he answered, painfully aware of his insincerity :

" Yes, of course. . . . What more is there to be said ? "

The adjutant walked up and down the room, smoking a cigarette, discussed the latest regimental news, and then took up his cap.

Trenieff accompanied his guests to the hall, wishing they would go, but prolonging the conversation that he might not be alone with his wife.

" One of my soldiers broke all his bones to-day," he said.

" Indeed ! " said the adjutant coldly, opening the door.

" We shall meet at the club this evening ? " continued Trenieff, in an embarrassed way.

" Most likely," replied the adjutant, and shut the door behind him.

Trenieff went back to his study. He would have liked to hide, feeling as he did that he was in no condition to endure one single angry word from his wife. The quarrel, evoked by some trifle which he had almost forgotten, now seemed futile and trivial. When he heard his wife's soft footstep outside the door his face was transformed by pain and hate.

" Stoipa,"¹ his wife called in the doorway. Her voice sounded friendly and penitent. There were traces of tears in her weary, swollen eyes although she had just washed her face. During the hours that had passed since their dispute she had had time to calm down and realize the stupidity and senselessness of it all. She forgot all the insults, all the unkind and unjust things Trenieff had said, only remembering that she had hurt his feelings. Passionately she longed for one thing—reconciliation, and she looked imploringly at her husband.

Trenieff understood her expression. But just because she was the first to recognize her fault, he forgot momentarily

¹ Diminutive of Stepan.

his own uneasy conscience and his readiness to ask her forgiveness. He only thought that at last he really must point out how unfair she had been to him.

"What is it?" he asked with intentional coldness.

She had come in with bare arms, her hair freshly arranged, her face powdered, with conscious coquetry, to produce an effect more by her charms than her words. But it was just this touching desire to please, and to atone for her fault by her beauty, that enabled Trenieff to assume indifference instead of softening him. "So that's it," he thought triumphantly.

"You are angry?" asked his wife, putting both hands on his shoulders.

The familiar touch of her bare arms melted Trenieff at once, but he persuaded himself that for once at least he must show force of character and punish her.

"What do you think, haven't I a right to be?"

A momentary annoyance flamed up in her eyes, but before he had time to be alarmed and regret his words which could only call forth another quarrel, she restrained herself and embraced him passionately, forcing him to cease from reproaching her.

"Don't now, don't!" Her sorrow and her irritation sounded clearly through the caressing tones of her voice.

Trenieff pulled himself together.

"Yes, all right," he said.

She closed his lips with a soft kiss.

He smiled. It was an ambiguous smile of tenderness, boredom and mistrust. He knew the reconciliation would not be of long duration.

"First she makes one miserable, torments one, and then tries to make up for it all with a kiss. . . . Judas kisses!" he thought.

She looked up into his eyes, then down at the blue shimmering dimple of her rounded, rosy arm, then up again at his eyes and lips.

"Now what is it?" he asked peevishly.

"Kiss me, you horrid wretch," she drawled capriciously.

Trenieff obediently touched her soft, cool skin with his lips.

"More," he heard her whisper coyly in his ear, that

whisper he had once thought like music but which now seemed the most ordinary human sound imaginable.

He bent down and kissed her once again.

The sensations which deprived him of his free will and condemned him to this servitude all his life, took possession of him once more. The accustomed voluptuous coolness of the woman's well-cared-for skin, the perfume of her body had excited him. Involuntarily he pressed her bare arm just above the elbow and began to kiss it more fiercely with closed eyes.

"You're tired, you poor dear." His wife clung to him, with her full figure. "Let's sit down."

She drew him on to the divan and looked into his face with passionate eyes pleading for caresses.

Trenieff knew every one of her words, every single movement, and this dreadful clarity of vision caused him a suffocating feeling of oppression. He submitted to her almost with disgust.

"Why are you so sad? . . . Are you bored with me? . . ." She coaxed.

"What put that into your head now? I've simply got a headache," he said, closing his eyes.

"Oh, my poor boy. . . . Does it hurt very much?"

She put a gentle hand on his brow and pressed her soft breast to his.

The ardent woman, always accessible, came nearer to him; her eyes grew more passionate. He began to kiss her hand, her shoulders, her breast.

"I don't love anybody else," he thought, and tears of emotion came into his eyes. But why did they quarrel and torment each other if they really cared? If he had only had a little freedom, and there had not been this damnable jealousy which bound him hand and foot and deprived him of every possibility of freshening his feelings. He would have come back to her. . . .

And while he tried hard to evoke his former passion and to forget the existence of other women he began to kiss the soft breast she offered him. She clung to him more closely.

For a time it seemed as though the old burning passion had not died, and that all contentions and desires for new happiness could be forgotten, as simple misunderstandings.

"How strong . . . you are to-day!" she whispered, drawing him to her with a kiss of gratitude.

But all Trenieff wanted was to light a cigarette and go out. The old oppression gripped his heart.

"Always the same, always the same . . ." flashed through his mind. "And so on for evermore."

"Leave me alone." He could control himself no longer. "I've got a headache. . . . I'm going into the garden for a breath of air."

His wife's eyes darkened. A spiteful, jealous line appeared at the corners of her mouth. His mind no longer held any secrets from her. She understood every one of his passing thoughts before he himself was conscious of it. And always, after these outbreaks of sensuality, there were the same dreadful scenes.

"Go where you like!" she said harshly, and got up, offended.

Trenieff was alarmed. "Well now, really, why are you so cross again at once? If I have a headache once in a way . . . ?"

"Oh yes! of course. . . . I'm not cross. What makes you think so? Go on now. . . . Take a little walk."

With all her strength she tried to suppress the hatred in her tone. But Trenieff knew that the very worst scenes of all were preceded by this false, insincere voice. Afterwards things would turn out just as they had done almost every day the last few years: tears, silence, entreaties, on his part; cries and hysteria on hers, pleading before closed doors, which he is powerless to leave, then an outburst of rage, the forcing open of the door, a fearful dispute and once again a reconciliation . . . and afterwards the old story all over again.

"I say, listen, that's really too silly. . . . Now, look here, tears . . . ? What are you crying about? I don't know what I've said to offend you. I don't understand it."

His wife left the room without answering.

"Now do listen . . . Katia."

Trenieff ran after her, reproaching himself bitterly for not concealing his feelings better. And at the same time he longed to break her bones, tear out her hair, and beat her unmercifully. This desire was unbearable. How often he

had given way to it and afterwards felt the greatest pity for her and the most supreme self-contempt.

"Oh, Lord ! . . . When will it all come to an end ? . . ." He hardly knew what he was saying, and feared every word beforehand.

A cold face with tear-stained eyes was turned towards him.

" You needn't worry, soon ! " she said spitefully.

His throat contracted. This threat, in which he did not for one instant believe, exasperated him. Feeling that he might strike his wife any minute, he turned round abruptly and quickly left the room.

It was bright and warm in the garden. Life went on unheeded in the tall grass. A fat little beetle crept clumsily up a long stem, losing its hold continually and falling to the ground. For a minute it lay there, stunned by the unexpected result of its venture, then moved cautiously to see that no harm had been done, resolutely smoothed out the creases of its chamberlain's coat and crawled up again with the same strange perseverance.

Trenieff sat down and watched the beetle, his brain whirling with a turbulent rush of thought.

How often he had made up his mind to remain firm to the end. A new life of freedom presented itself to his imagination, vague but seductive. He dreamt of young, tender girls whom he could meet joyfully, fearlessly revelling in their charms ; then he would go on, free as the wind in the fields.

The world is boundless and joy is like the blue sea. Like a doomed convict, Trenieff dreamt of it hopelessly, passionately, with mad ecstasy. After every one of those futile scenes during which two people who loved one another did their best mutually to inflict deep wounds, he had realized that only one more word was needed to sever them. Each to go their own way, to take their full share of happiness from life. But this word was never uttered. Once when the separation was almost accomplished, and the chill of a broken life blew into the rooms from scattered trunks and open drawers, the accursed yet sweet love suddenly flamed up once more. It was unimaginable that from that moment they should be strangers, that the ten years of

married life with their joys and sorrows should mean nothing but vain memories. From the next day neither would have any share in the other's life. They looked at one another piteously and the last farewell was followed by tears, pathetic desires, apologies and kisses, and finally reconciliation brought about the most intense physical communion. Their caresses were passionate and unrestrained, their lips, wet with tears, burned like fire. Then came the great tenderness of love.

"Why do we quarrel?" she asked, clinging to him.

Trenieff soothed her by saying it must be a temporary madness, and from thenceforth their life really seemed to start afresh through their love and tenderness. Days, sometimes weeks, passed as in the first period of their love, as though the past ten years had been a dream and she were still the same young love-sick girl for whose sake he had once suffered so much. The sun shone brightly in their rooms and the children shouted gaily as they ran about. It was the true happiness of that ideal love of which the world spoke and dreamt so much.

Gradually satiety and boredom set in again, fine as the blade of a knife that slowly prunes away life. He could not cope with the situation.

"I do love her," he thought, grasping his head; "another woman would never take her place. I couldn't forget her. And can I imagine her belonging to another?"

This last thought sent the blood to his head and he grew hot. He forced himself cynically to consider this nightmare in detail, but he could not bear it.

"Well, what is it then. . . . Do I simply need a change, a new amusement? . . . To the devil with them all, may they be thrice accursed!"

His thoughts reverted again and again to the same point. Their love was the only true one, and no other could bring them happiness. But as it did not make them happy, it was evident that they both needed variety. Then they could return to one another. But she had as much right as himself to demand a change. He really ought to go away and seek distraction, allowing her the same freedom for a time.

He could not bear even to think of this. So he did his

best to make the sacrifice, to forget other women and to think only of his wife.

For one or two weeks it was successful, but then came unexpected frightful scenes, so revolting that they could not look their servants or their children in the face, scarcely the very walls of their house. They reproached one another for their readiness to yield, reminding each other who had been the first to apologize, mutually deriding their weakness.

Thus days and years went by, full of desire for some vague happiness, which certainly never materialized, though always on the verge of doing so.

And no one, neither his brother-officers nor the soldiers whom he terrified like children with his harsh voice and fierce looks, had the slightest suspicion that this strong-willed man was unhappy and miserable.

"My God, my God," thought Trenieff, twirling his moustache and attentively examining the crawling beetle. It gave him a distressing pleasure to watch it scramble up to the heights only to sink to the dust again. It was like the painful enjoyment one experiences in irritating an open wound.

CHAPTER XVIII

TCHISH sat at home rolling cigarettes. The sun was setting, and beyond the garden the dust, slowly settling down in the evening air, glimmered golden. The green leaves of the trees darkened and began to shine with dew. High up, however, transparent sun-rays flitted across the outer branches of the trees, enveloping them completely.

Tchish did not look out of the window. He stood beside it stooping and filling one paper after another with strong-smelling coarse tobacco, while every now and then he pushed his shirt-front under his waistcoat.

The room was small, with only one window and bare white walls. The table, which was covered with an old newspaper, the chairs, and even the bed were littered with books, magazines and pamphlets of all kinds. This gave the room just such a disordered aspect as Tchish himself possessed with his sharp, mobile face, his embittered, nervous movements, and the angry tousled shock of hair above his forehead.

The tall Cornet Krause was sitting sideways at the table, attentively following Tchish's skilful fingers with knitted brows.

"I simply hate to hear that kind of thing," said Tchish sharply. "I don't understand this wailing—and don't want to either. You can propound any theories you like about the futility of life, and I shall always say that they are the outcome of your own slackness and nothing else. Damn it all, this life never promised you anything. It was left to you to make what you pleased of it. You can make a work-room of it and a temple, or a bored lady's boudoir. Funny, by God!"

"Do you think it's so insignificant then?" asked Krause.

Untidy Mishka, who had been lying on some pamphlets on the bed, raised himself slightly, seized one of the cigarettes which had just fallen from the filler, tore off the protruding

ends of tobacco, lighted it, and threw himself down again on the pillows, his hands under his head.

Tchish pretended not to see this unnecessary action, although it would have been much easier to take a ready-cut cigarette than to pull off the tobacco with the fingers.

"It isn't insignificant at all. Nature has given it a sharply defined form. Man is in conflict with it, and is at liberty to choose his own methods in the strife. What we call life is the result of his selection. So if your own way of living becomes a burden to you, no longer satisfies you, then search for other tactics in the fight. If you are lucky enough to find them, then, of course, you feel satisfaction, you see a clear reason and are pleased with everything. Only one must strive and seek, not lament."

"Well, what ought one to do, according to that?" asked Mishka indifferently.

"What? Nothing!" cried Tchish, with fierce irony, straightening mechanically the heap of cigarettes disarranged by Mishka. "A sensible man knows what to do himself. And if he doesn't know it, it's no use asking other people for information. Deuce take it, the world isn't an infirmary. Struggles everywhere, the country fighting for freedom, art seeking new paths, science at work—not sitting with their hands in their pockets. Men will fly in the air, and the whole manner of life will change. But you lie there with your knees up and ask innocently what there is to be done. Yes, play chess, and go to hell."

Mishka winked, pretending to follow attentively the smoke from his cigarette.

"Perhaps it is so. At any rate it's a curious theory that actually happiness only depends on the choice of tactics against nature," began Krause, with dignity. "So we are right in considering it a person's plain duty to seek such methods?" He raised his eyebrows and looked questioningly at Tchish.

Tchish flung a fresh cigarette on the table angrily.

"Let us assume," continued Krause, without waiting for an answer, "that I am not in the least desirous of pursuing any such conflict, but prefer to resign the privilege from the beginning. Am I a criminal in any way?"

"Not a criminal, but simply a blockhead," cried Tchish.

"Only a corpse—an abnormal being can talk like that, and what's more, a person who only cares for his own comfort, and doesn't mind in the least whether mankind is happy or not."

"Let us assume that it is absolutely immaterial to me," said Cornet Krause quietly.

Tchish was rather embarrassed. To a certain extent he was convinced that it was everyone's duty to believe in something, to stand for something, that phrases like : 'A person who believes in nothing, who only thinks of himself,' were insults, and meant at least as much as if some one had called him a dunderhead, if not an idiot. He could not imagine how anybody could help trying to clear himself from this imputation.

"In the first place I don't believe you, and if it were true you would simply be a mental invalid."

"It's all the same," replied Krause, with dignity. "Call it so if you like."

"A dead man!"

"No, certainly not, I am a live man," said Krause, with the same seriousness.

"Yes, I breathe, therefore I exist," Tchish laughed mockingly, and threw a fresh cigarette on the table. "But existing doesn't mean living. If you are not slandering yourself, the living spark which is handed down from one generation to another, the very source of life, must be atrophied. Though you may breathe, move and think, you have no life in you, but death. That delicate ray, which has filtered through millions of human beings, seems to have dried up in you, to have come to an end. But that end is already the beginning of corruption, which would mean no less than to be a decaying corpse in the midst of life. Forgive me, Krause, but in its own interests humanity ought to put an end to such people."

"That is its privilege." The tall cornet shrugged his shoulders.

"I say, that's going too far," observed Mishka.

"Nothing goes too far." Tchish showed his teeth in a perfect passion of rage. "Humanity has done an enormous amount of work, entailing colossal sacrifices, to lay the foundation for its immense structure. We have been given

this mighty task with the assumption that we shall accept our precious inheritance and carry on the work. But here —just consider this ; some disappointed fellow begins to whimper : Nothing is necessary, it's all nonsense, and you great men who have sacrificed yourselves were simply fools ! . . . Fools ! " laughed Tchish. He could not have explained why a shade of uneasiness crept into this furious, self-confident laughter. But a thought glided through the depths of his consciousness, almost without his being aware of it : Supposing they really were fools ?

" I don't say that," remarked Krause. " From your point of view you would be right, but from mine . . . "

" And if that's the case," continued Tchish, paying no attention to him, " don't go near others, wither away by yourself. If you believe in nothing, and have no use for humanity, if your soul is a blank and your life uninteresting, then be good enough to put a bullet through your head, and go to the devil . . . at least that's honourable . . . and then you won't sully the air."

" And how do you know that isn't just what I mean to do ? "

Tchish stared at Krause with alarm. The latter's long face with the slanting eyebrows was, as usual, full of quiet dignity. The young student shuddered involuntarily, but he strove against the belief that this remark had not only been made for the sake of a clever reply, a point in the argument.

Mishka turned round too and looked at the cornet.

" So you are thinking of putting an end to your life by suicide, are you ? " asked Tchish, with a forced smile. And it flashed across his mind : " There you are . . . you can expect anything from a German."

" Possibly," answered Cornet Krause, still more shortly, and his face grew still colder and more secretive.

Tchish became confused again. But as he did not want to give in, and because he wanted to be logical to the end, he said :

" Well, and even so . . . you would be perfectly right from your point of view." As he said it, he was frightened at his own words.

" Do you think so ? " asked Krause seriously.

Tchish was angry. That seemed like the last word, as though Krause meant to corner him.

"Well, yes . . . I do ! "

Cornet Krause was silent for a time, looking at him unflinchingly, as if to test him. Tchish turned away involuntarily and looked for another cigarette paper in the box, although there was already one on the machine.

"Yes," said Krause, with peculiar emphasis, rising and taking his small cavalry cap. "Good-bye for the present ! "

"Wait, where are you off to ? "

"I want to be alone for a time," replied the cornet coolly.

"Stop a minute," cried Tchish, forcing himself to laugh. "You might be going to . . ."—'shoot yourself,' he wanted to add; but the words struck him as so odd and foolish that they stuck in his throat. "Wait a minute, Krause, you know that's . . ."

But Krause shut the door without replying.

"Oh ! Go to the devil !" cried the little student helplessly, "he's quite mad."

Mishka, dishevelled after lying down so long, raised himself slightly and sat on the bed, resting on his hands.

"You were wrong to say that to him," he observed.

"To say what ? "

"Well, he's for ever talking of suicide, and now you are just going the right way about to drive him to it."

Tchish flared up: "Go to the devil, and as far as I'm concerned, to the devil with him too. . . . Those who talk a lot about suicide will never kill themselves, that's a fact. Let's go for a walk."

"All right, let's go," agreed Mishka phlegmatically.

It was evidently all the same to him whether he slept, went for a walk, or did nothing.

CHAPTER XIX

THE earth was wrapped in the soft warm melancholy of dusk, and was beautiful and mysterious as a young girl lost in thought. High up shone great stars, in whose bright light the sky looked very deep and wide.

Tchish and Mishka walked slowly and aimlessly along the deserted boulevard. Tchish was bored and Mishka walked noiselessly beside him ; it was impossible to divine his real thoughts. The little town was quiet, and the houses with their dark windows crept past them blindly. Above them was the cold, remote sky traversed by the stars in their courses, with their mysterious whispering and the magical blue flowers of light which they cast down to earth. Deep in the darkness before Tchish's eyes was Cornet Krause's narrow white face, and somewhere he heard his drawling affected voice.

" Damn it all," thought Tchish, irritated, " stay one or two years more in this cursed hole and your own best friend will be a nail in the wall."

As usual he began to persuade himself of the contemptibility of the little town, and to dream of the great exciting life from which it excluded him ; but all at once that seemed boring and entirely out of place. The deep peace that the blue evening held gave rise to many vague, sad thoughts. And the narrow pale face with the coldly-knitted low eyebrows haunted him. At last he turned uneasily to Mishka.

" What are you thinking of, Mishka ? "

" Eh ? " Mishka's voice seemed to come from far away.

" Why are you so quiet ? " repeated the little student.

" Ah, yes ! I was just thinking of something — in chess . . ." answered Mishka absent-mindedly.

Tchish spat and puffed himself out furiously.

" You'll go mad one of these days with your idiotic chess."

" Perhaps," agreed Mishka good-humouredly.

They went on in silence, gazing at the stars. Mishka

thought about chess. The fine transparent net of constellations was interwoven before his eyes in new patterns. Involuntarily he wondered what would happen if one were to check the farthest star in the Great Bear with the bright coarse-grained Pole star ; and strangely enough the scale-beam of this majestic constellation reminded him of the knight's leap.

Every now and then they brushed against each other in the darkness ; the thoughts of each, utterly dissimilar, were uninterrupted. And if they had suddenly been set as far apart one from the other as their thoughts already were, they would have been as remote as the distant, lonely stars.

"Good evening, Kyril Dmitrievitch !" some one called out to the young student.

Tchish raised his head, and saw Dchenieff with a girl in a white dress and acknowledged the greeting sulkily.

Then he recognized the girl too—his pupils' sister—glanced angrily at her and thought : 'She too !'

Tchish did not want to think any more about her ; it seemed as though something specially important was occupying his mind at the moment. But he could not remember what it was. He could only see the strong, healthy girlish figure which had just passed him. And he was doubly annoyed to think that she had made Dchenieff's acquaintance.

"To the devil with her !" he said to himself irritably. "What's she to do with me ?" He forced himself to grope for those great majestic ideas which govern life, in order to banish his discouragement, but they also escaped him, and instead he saw his own life grey, dull and uneventful. For the first time he began to reflect upon it.

He had been a schoolboy and had had to walk his feet off giving extra lessons ; he had become a student and hurried from one lecture to another, had listened to the professors, had quarrelled with comrades and members of the opposing party over details and plans of the political programme ; he had taken forbidden pamphlets to factories and workshops and talked to strangers, really quite uninteresting people whom he had long lost sight of. All this time full of work, excitement and worries was blurred into

one grey, desolate path, along which he had been crawling for thirty years, without knowing why he did so. Certainly, when there was shooting in the streets, crowds of people parading about with red flags and everything was disorganized, the goal had seemed to be reached and a new life begun. But immediately after everything was the same as before, perhaps even worse. After the rising the people were still the same brutal pack as formerly ; but whereas before the Revolution a great feeling of common hatred united them, at the decisive moment the pettiest disagreements over the programme arose. As if the mere programme were—life. Then Tchish had been in prison for a long time. There he had dreamt no longer of the triumph of the proletariat, but was simply bored to death, counting every day and protesting against the abolition of the free quarter-of-an-hour. Finally his whole life had centred in the four walls of his cell and the trivial interests of a wretched, broken existence.

At length he was sent home an exile. Life went on its way and completely forgot the little student, who remained lying by the roadside.

Now, with nothing left but to live in hopes of better times, the whole past seemed so pale and trivial that his heart grew heavy. What was to happen if he had really laboured in vain and hurried aimlessly from one place to another, and must now say to himself in the end that he had only made himself ridiculous.

As though to strengthen this hopeless verdict, it struck him at the same moment that all his life he had done nothing but take refuge in one hope after another. In the beginning he had hoped to finish school and go to the university, then came the Revolution and he cherished dreams of launching out into freedom, now he was impatient for his period of police supervision to come to an end. And later on he would still be expecting something else, and die in the hope that to-morrow his true life would begin.

Vaguely, almost shapelessly, the thought flashed across his mind that perhaps the best thing was to avoid all these useless stages and make straight for the goal. Again the narrow white face of Cornet Krause appeared in the gloom and moved on, as though beckoning him to follow.

CHAPTER XX

DCHENIEFF and Lisa Tregulova walked silently down the dark street.

The pale light of the stars fell on the girl's face and lent it that subtle charm which for thousands of centuries has called forth the promise of a new, strange happiness. How many warm summer nights, how many wild spring evenings have been fanned by the light mysterious breeze of girlish youth, as by a fairy-tale that fades away in the prosaic light of day.

Dchenieff stooped slightly to look at the white face, quite under the impression that the beautiful girl was going to caress and embrace him. He was trembling with eagerness for the first kiss, strangely forgetting that something usually leads to it.

"Why did you want to get to know me so much?" His trembling excited whisper held all that secret fascination of desire which only women understand.

Lisa had just confessed that she had long wanted to know him; but to this she replied indifferently with a girl's instinctive cunning: "People talk a lot about you."

"Who?"

"So many. . . . I suppose you've no idea how much notice is taken of you here? But it's quite natural, of course."

"Why is it natural?" He pretended to be very astonished, to induce her to go on talking.

"Well, what do you think?" said Lisa impatiently. "You are an artist, people write about you, and then . . ." She broke off unexpectedly.

"What . . . then?"

"Look, there's a shooting star."

"All right." Dchenieff made an impatient movement. "What do you mean, then?"

Lisa pretended not to hear. "How warm it is to-night!"

She was frightened at what had nearly escaped her,

although it excited her passionately, as though a secret behind a forbidden curtain were attracting her simple soul and her healthy body. She longed to ask him about his relations with women, about Nelly or that schoolgirl who had tried to shoot herself last year, whose people had sent her away somewhere to the south.

Dchenieff knew this quite clearly, and to keep her to the subject he persevered with his question.

"Now, you shan't escape me. I know you changed the conversation on purpose. Tell me, what do people say about me that's so bad you can't repeat it ? "

He was silent for a moment, and then added : "Otherwise I shall think they've said something very dreadful."

Lisa became embarrassed.

"Oh, no ! Of course not. . . . Nothing particular. . . ."

"Yes, they have."

"Well, they say you've had a lot of affairs with women and that you . . . have a bad opinion of them."

"And what do you think. Is it true ? "

"I don't know. . . . It seems to me to be true."

She drew herself up sharply with these words as though she had been personally insulted.

"What seems true ? "

"That you only see the woman in women."

As though he meant to push her further and further down the path of dark, sinful thought, he went on with his questions in the same strain.

"What does that mean, to see a woman as a woman ? "

"You know quite well," she said in confusion.

He smiled ambiguously, and this made Lisa feel that she herself was one of these women through whose light, thin dress his eyes could pierce without any difficulty.

"How else is one to look at a woman ? "

"How ? Isn't a woman a human being ? Is she that and nothing more ? " replied the girl excitedly.

"What have human beings to do with it ? " answered Dchenieff in his self-confident voice. "Does the love for a woman, as a woman, exclude respect for her ? "

"No, not that. . . ." Lisa became very embarrassed. "But you only see one side of her. . . ."

She felt that he was involving her in an obscure argu-

ment which he was following for some purpose, but she did not know how to evade this alarming and at the same time exciting conversation.

"That depends on the women themselves," answered Dchenieff. "Those whom I treated like that deserved no better. A woman can always arrange her relation to a man to suit herself. And as for me, I take what I want from every woman. If I want a human being I shall certainly look elsewhere, but more likely in a man, for after all he is wiser and riper than a woman. Why should I talk to a woman about art, science, politics and that sort of thing. I can find artists, authors, scholars for that who can give me more! In a woman I look for caresses, for beauty, enjoyment; I love her in her womanliness, her tenderness, her body. . . ."

His hot breath fanned the girl's cheeks, wrapping her in a sweet, sultry mist.

"That's very wrong," she said, with one last protest of her virgin purity.

"It isn't wrong," replied Dchenieff argumentatively. "Every woman, yourself included, is born to love. That is a law of nature, a pure and beautiful delight, which only stupidity and laxity would drag down into the mire. You may go in for what you like later—learning or art, or whatever you please—you will love all the same, because you are a healthy and beautiful girl. You will love some one; caress him, give yourself to him; so of course I have the right to wish it should be myself!"

Imperceptibly he had begun to talk frankly about herself, but Lisa did not understand him at once. When she realized, she blushed hotly and hung her head. Without giving her time to recover herself or to be angry, and thus raise an impassable barrier of cool self-defence between them, he continued: "And at this moment, for instance, I certainly don't want to talk to you of the philosophy of woman, but simply to kiss you!"

Lisa started back in alarm. Dchenieff felt that he had been too hasty and that she might leave him.

"Are you angry?" he asked, altering his voice at once, and bending towards her kindly, trying to look into her eyes, which were gazing straight past him.

"Are you angry? Well, I beg your pardon. I didn't mean to offend you . . . dear girl."

Lisa almost laughed: his voice was so guilty and pleading.

"No," she said. "But why do you say all that?"

"Because it's the truth," answered Dchenieff decisively.

Lisa shrugged her shoulders in perplexity.

"And I suppose I've the right to dream of that? Haven't I? One may dream what one likes."

She saw that he was setting a trap for her, but she did not know how to avoid it.

"Well yes, you've the right to do that," she replied mechanically.

"But when I have the right to dream of it, why shouldn't I tell the truth . . . why lie and dissemble? That would be absurd. I want to kiss you and I say so."

"Well, say so then," murmured Lisa, making a helpless effort to turn it all into a joke.

"But shall I ever be able to do it? Will it ever come true?" asked Dchenieff suddenly, close to the girl's ear.

"I don't know," escaped her half-unconsciously. All at once she felt that he was going to kiss her and her whole body began to tremble. Dchenieff put his hand round her supple figure, his lips caressed her cheek and then covered her mouth with a mad kiss. She resisted, pushing him away with both hands, but he took hold of her neck with the other hand and pressed her lips to his own with such force that he could feel her cold teeth.

Lisa was almost smothered, and seemed to lose consciousness for a second; then she tore herself desperately away and jumped back against the fence.

"What insolence . . . how dare you?" she cried, grasping the railings for safety.

Her hat had slipped back, her hair was tangled, her face burned, she gasped and was ready to cry.

But Dchenieff again allowed her no time to recover her self-possession and slip from him.

"Forgive me," he said in a coaxing, caressing tone. "I insulted you . . . forgive me. . . . It's not my fault that you take it like that . . . well, all right, I'm going."

He went on talking, so humble and unhappy, that Lisa could no longer be angry.

"I'm not cross. That would be ridiculous. It was my own fault. Only it mustn't happen . . . not again," she said with an effort, tears coming into her eyes.

"Forgive me," said Dchenieff once again, still more sadly and tenderly, looking up into her eyes as if he still had something to ask her. This persistent supplication disarmed her, embarrassed her, and seemed to preclude the possibility of angry words.

"Very well, then"—she no longer knew which way to turn—"I am not angry. Stop now. . . . Good-bye."

She had not noticed before that they had been standing a long time at the door of her house.

"But we shall see each other again. . . . You've forgiven me. Now prove your forgiveness! We shall meet, shan't we?"

"Yes, yes. . . . I don't know . . . all right. . . ." She picked up her skirt, nodded her head, and ran into the courtyard, banging the gate.

Dchenieff stayed where he was for some time, looking through the darkness with sharpened eyes; then he turned round smiling and went back. He knew that they would meet again and that she would love him.

CHAPTER XXI

DR. ARNOLDI conscientiously performed his allotted task of amusing Genitchka. At his instigation Arbusoff had arranged a picnic in a birch coppice outside the town, and on the day arranged he went himself towards sunset to call for Eugenia Samoilovna.

He found her quite ready. As usual she was in red, but this time she wore a light transparent dress which set off perfectly the magnificent beauty of her graceful figure. Even the morose, indifferent doctor glanced involuntarily at the pure outline of her shoulders, which her low-necked dress showed so well,

"Well, shall we start?" he asked.

"I'm ready." She picked up her hat joyfully. This house oppressed her with its two pale women full of their sorrow, the one slowly dying, the other passing her time without a smile or word of greeting. She was looking forward like a child to this picnic, which had only been arranged on her account. Besides, she knew that there would be interesting young people there, and that she herself would be the centre of attraction.

As she stood before the looking-glass, putting on her hat, Maria Pavlovna watched her, smiling gently. She had grown accustomed to the fact that these pleasures no longer existed for her, and did not envy Genitchka. She only felt a little anxious, though she tried to suppress her sadness.

"Now, Doctor," she said, "I'm putting my Genitchka in your charge. Cheer her up a little. Look how pretty she is. I shall be happier too, if I think that you two are enjoying yourselves. Poor thing, she's had so much to put up with here."

"Don't say such silly things, Masha . . . I don't like it," cried Eugenia Samoilovna. Her conscience was vaguely uneasy about her sick friend, and she was trying to hide the smiles of excitement that would play about her lips.

She pretended not to care about the expedition and only to be taking part in it because Dr. Arnoldi had been at such pains to arrange it.

"Now, are you sure you won't be dull?" she asked Maria Pavlovna as she kissed her. "Otherwise I'd rather not go."

"No, no, certainly not. Of course you must go, dear. You'll be giving me pleasure by doing so." The invalid forced herself to smile.

Eugenia Samoilovna sighed imperceptibly, and for a moment she could hardly bear to think of the excursion. But no sooner had the door closed behind her than the joyous excitement which was coursing through her whole body broke out. Forgetting that Dr. Arnoldi was a gloomy old man, she seized his hand, and made him run down the steps.

"Quick, Doctor, quick! Let's go, let's go. Oh! how lovely. To-night I'm going to drink and sing and run and dance. . . . Why are you so wretched? Aren't you ashamed of yourself? . . . Now, Doctor, put on another face, for to-day at any rate."

The heavy doctor was panting to keep up with her, but she beamed the whole way while she teased her silent escort.

The sun was low over the horizon, which was merged in its red glare. Fiery patches dotted the white trunks of the birches at the edge of the wood, the green glowed vividly, while in the depths of the coppice the stems gleamed blue and the dense thickets were almost black by contrast. Further on, where the birches were fewer, a steep path led down to the river, which plashed gently against the sand-banks. The stretch of water lay so still and smooth that the reflections of light were motionless, and only glittered in undulating lines along the sand-bank where the silvery edge of a scarcely perceptible wave lapped against them.

Arbusoff's coachman arranged the picnic tables and covered them with white cloths; the samovars were boiling at one side, and small piles of wood were burning to drive away gnats. Boxes of food and bottles lay on the grass. The unharnessed horses stood behind the bushes, gently swishing their tails. Tchish, Mishka and Davidenko had gone to bathe below the slope. Arbusoff, Trenieff, Cornet

Krause and Naumoff were lying on the grass drinking beer; Dchenieff sat by himself at the edge of the slope and looked across at the opposite bank at the peasants' white huts. The still water and the naked bodies of the students shimmered rosily.

He threw his hat on the grass, breathing in the freshness from the river below; his being expanded, as though his whole body were filled with the playful spirit of the wood, like new wine.

He looked at the brilliant colours of the sunset, smiling pensively and happily. In his mind's eye he saw Lisa's enamoured, embarrassed face, remembered her efforts to escape from his caresses and her first unpractised kisses.

They had met almost every day. The girl knew now that she loved him and allowed him to embrace her. After every meeting Dchenieff went away excited and yet dissatisfied with her chaste caresses. He wanted her intensely, wished to possess her altogether, and thought only of one thing, without bothering about the consequences—how he could induce her to visit him. There in his own surroundings he was convinced that she would not be able to withstand his kisses and entreaties.

The girl had refused for a long time to come and see him, always repeating the same question, "Yes, but what for?"

And when he assured her in a sincere voice that he only wanted to see her alone and show her his studio, she looked searchingly at him and tears crept under her eyelashes, betraying her inward anxiety.

Finally he succeeded in persuading her, and she had promised to come the next day. At the thought Dchenieff clenched his hands convulsively and his whole body responded to the rich warmth of the evening sun and the damp coolness of the river.

He heard loud voices, the crunch of wheels and a woman's ringing laugh. He looked round curiously.

In the midst of a lively group of men the red gleam of a woman's figure was sharply defined against the dark green meadows. Trenieff with his twisted moustache was bending over to kiss one outstretched hand, the other was clasped between the giant Davidenko's paws. The woman herself stood laughing on the green grass between the two, as if

crucified, her red dress falling gracefully round her delicate, supple figure ; her black eyes were sparkling in her rosy face.

" It seems that I'm alone ! " she cried joyfully, not in the least embarrassed at being surrounded by so many men.

Dr. Arnoldi, in his sail-cloth jacket, stood behind her ; he introduced her to Dchenieff, who had come up immediately.

She threw him a quick, inquisitive glance, but turned away at once, and began to run, tripping over her long dress and almost falling. Finally she announced her intention of bathing.

" You'll get drowned ! It's very deep here," said tall Krause.

" Nonsense, I swim like a fish. But isn't there a bathing-house ? "

" You can rely on our discretion," said Trenieff, his eyes beginning to gleam.

" Oh ! don't you be too sure of that, Eugenia Samoilovna," cried Davidenko. " You are at our mercy."

Genitchka shook her head coyly and held up her finger threateningly. She entered quite naturally into all their jokes and liberties, picked up her dress and ran to the slope.

Her sudden appearance, the red dress, her white shoulders and her sparkling eyes had dazzled them all. When she had disappeared over the slope the men were silent for some time, each trying to emphasize to the others the fact that he was turning away from the river. Gradually they settled down and seated themselves at the table. Naumoff reopened the interrupted conversation.

Turning sharply and violently to Tchish, who ruffled himself up as though instantly ready for a fray, he remarked :

" You say that suicide is cowardice and an unnatural phenomenon. I don't agree with that at all. I suppose the truth of the matter is that one ought neither to approve of suicide nor to condemn it. In any case it requires great strength of will to put an end to one's life. And of all modes of death that exist in the world the most natural is—suicide."

There was something in his harsh, fanatical voice which

rasped the nerves unpleasantly, that obliged every one to listen to him, whatever he might say.

"That's a paradox," observed Tchish, reaching for a cup of tea.

"Not in the least," cried Naumoff violently, "every death is monstrous, though it were a thousand times a law of nature. Death is an act of violence against the race, and only suicide is free. You can't say it's natural if I want to live and have to die, but still less can you say it's unnatural if I die of my own free will as soon as there is nothing left for me to live for, simply because I don't want to live any longer."

"Why can't you understand," answered Tchish very querulously, as though he had to explain a hackneyed aphorism to a particularly dense person, "that the abnormality does not lie in the inconsistency of the end? Of course if you no longer care to live, it's quite right that you should put an end to the boring affair. What is unnatural is that death ever can seem desirable to a human being. I am convinced that it would never occur to anyone who was not ill, mad, or had gone off the tracks in some way, to send a bullet through his head, or crawl into the noose, the devil only knowing why."

They all listened to the young student and eagerly awaited Naumoff's reply. Only Cornet Krause, his slanting eyebrows arrogantly knitted, looked coolly and condescendingly before him.

"On the contrary, it seems to me unnatural that humanity, after bitter experience has convinced it that life in its deepest essentials is unhappy, has not as yet arrived at the conclusion that death is the best remedy to put an end to this endless, useless martyrdom once and for all. Why do you think it's the most natural thing for people to live? It may be natural to fear death, for it is painful in most cases, and what lies beyond it is a mystery. But the will to live . . . I don't understand that. Have you ever once seen a happy life?"

"Yes, of course," said Davidenko, shrugging his huge shoulders.

"Oh! you've seen one, have you?" Naumoff turned to him. "I haven't! I never saw a happy love or a happy

marriage, never anyone who was contented with his lot nor one who had not been ill, who had not suffered or wept. Have you seen one? Show him to me! Show him to me and I'll send my whole theory to the devil."

"Oh! you have a theory? That does interest me," said Tchish scornfully. Naumoff's words enraged him, and he quite forgot that never a day passed but he himself felt unhappy and built castles in the air; he only thought it was his duty to contradict this strange person with his dangerous ideas.

"Yes, I actually have a theory!" Naumoff bowed to him with indescribable irony. "If you care to hear, I'll explain it to you."

"It would be interesting!"

Tall Krause raised his eyebrows still higher and turned hastily to Naumoff. "Do you mean that seriously? For what reason . . . ?"

Naumoff gave him a penetrating glance as though he saw in Krause's narrow white face something out of the common which was not yet apparent to the others.

"I say what I think and I believe in its truth. And why? So as to terminate the unnecessary suffering in which the human race has lived for thousands of years in the foolish hope of a happiness that is incompatible with the meaning of human life. For happiness is complete lethargy. It is an old threadbare aphorism that suffering is the cause of progress. Give us happiness, and we shall stand still. Think of it: the whole history of the world is one uninterrupted stream of sorrow, pain, hate and all that is dark in human imagination. That is the life of man. But why shall man go on suffering for ever? It's high time people understood that they have no right to condemn the endless generations of the future to the same sufferings that millions of those who have gone before have already lived through. One writhes in torments, curses one's existence every day, but does all in one's power to prevent the end from ever coming. . . . What does that mean? Is it bestiality, stupidity or some devilish deception?"

"It's simply the instinct of life, invincible and, fortunately for everybody, opposed to your theory," answered Tchish furiously.

"That is unhappily true," said Naumoff firmly. "Some treacherous force has planted in us this instinct which is our curse. But humanity has not fought in vain against a host of instincts; if it is an instinct, it must be subdued."

"To ensure that you will have to re-model humanity altogether," said Davidenko.

"If necessary, I shall do so . . ." answered Naumoff calmly.

Tchish laughed. "Yes, but what's going to happen?"

"I have already said unnecessary sufferings will be decreased."

"You may be sure you will never succeed."

"What makes you think so?" asked Naumoff slowly.

"Because the instinct of life is indestructible, and not even the most plausible of empty phrases will destroy it."

"Those aren't empty phrases. Besides, destruction will not be necessary. It will decay of its own accord."

"The deuce only knows what you are talking about," cried Tchish in honest resentment.

"Everything dies; everything grows, attains its prime and dies. That is a law. Why do you want to exclude the human mind from it? When our intellect, sooner or later, has reached its zenith, it will decline and stand still like the mist over the swamp. Everything will bore people. Do you really think now that they will always enjoy quarrelling, changing their paltry governments, painting pictures, healing the sick, writing, making statues, always falling in love, always digging the earth and making it into bricks, always to live and again to live? . . . Do understand that is not only tedious but foolish. A time must come when the field of human activity will be empty. People will take aim and shoot one another for pleasure, will drown themselves in crowds, hang themselves, throw themselves down from cliffs. Mothers will conceive in terror and carry away their babies, for no one will want them or look after them. They will foresee the future misery of children in their cradles, the sufferings, the diseases, credulism, degeneration. The women, grown apathetic, will refuse to bear children and will cast the new-born aside where they are delivered of them."

Naumoff's voice was full of sustained power. His eyes burned, looking across the heads of his audience, as though they could see in the distance the black destiny of mankind.

They all shuddered, all felt uneasy, even Tchish kept silence. A new truth, perhaps not proclaimed with that mighty power with which it should have resounded over the earth, stood before them. Each one examined his own life involuntarily and to each it appeared as a hopeless grey vision.

"I declare war on life," continued Naumoff. "I refuse to acknowledge it, I deny and curse it. . . . All those who sang hymns for the continuation of life for all eternity, and offered up their souls for it, were thought to be benefactors of the human race, temples and monuments were erected to them. But I call them enemies of mankind. They must have seen, must have known that they were leading men to the shambles. To endless martyrdom! Accursed be all those thinkers, prophets, poets and scholars. They have forced us to shut our eyes to the terrible reality and to dream of happiness, whereas one need only open one's eyes to recoil from life once and for all in loathing and repulsion."

"Listen to me," cried Tchish, almost as though he were suffering physical pain. "Who are you to come forward and talk like a prophet? It's simply ludicrous. You declare war, curse. . . . Who's going to listen to you, or believe you? What on earth is the object of going about with such absurd ideas?"

"Ah! if it's only that I can tell you: if I should wake up a thousand years hence and see armies slaughtering one another on this hillside, there by the river factories full of starving people, here in the wood, churchyards, hospitals or mad-houses, I should have the right to announce to those people: 'Look, I explained all that to you a thousand years ago.' But you're right on one point. I have allowed myself to be carried away. We came here to enjoy ourselves and not to quarrel. Now that's enough!"

Naumoff was silent.

There was a long strained pause. The gloomy words had roused various emotions and moved their imagination. Perhaps none of them agreed with him, perhaps they all

thought him a little mad or a braggart, but yet there had been something in what he said which had stirred their thoughts as the wind stirs the fallen leaves of autumn.

"What is one to call this theory?" Tchish was the first to speak.

"The highest humanity," replied Naumoff promptly.

"A nice humanity . . . a humanity which invites the destruction of itself. It's nonsense."

"There are thousands of people living on the earth at present . . . millions. What innumerable bands of unhappy creatures the future may expect. Can one imagine calmly this colossal herd of sufferers? It is because of them that I speak of the decay of the human race, and I believe my conception to be the most humane that the brain of man could devise!"

Tchish made a gesture of perplexity.

His mind held a thousand memories, each of which appeared completely to destroy these fantastic ideas. But for some reason he could not shape them into words. All that Tchish knew about the future triumph of socialism, of liberty, equality, and fraternity was inappropriate to the occasion. For the first time he felt that there was a theoretical element in his beliefs which lacked the spark of life. But in this case he would have had to base his reply on the most elementary physical sensations, on the pleasure in the simplest form of animal life. And the little student could find no words for that.

"Splendid," cried Arbusoff suddenly, who till then had gazed silently with his angry, inflamed eyes at Naumoff's face. "Ah! if one could only set fire to this stupid earth at all four corners, and then let the winds loose on it! That's enough of it, curse it."

"Those are empty words," replied Tchish. "You all curse life and run to the doctor as soon as you get a sore throat. That's why it's no use wasting words about it."

"It doesn't seem to me," said Cornet Krause coolly, "that that's any objection."

"Naturally," said Naumoff wearily, the glow in his eyes fading. "I've already said that death is terrible. That is a law. Once, in the excess of my enthusiasm I used to try to awaken the joy of suicide in people. But suicide

is too hard, too painful. Other means are necessary, and they will be found. . . ."

Tchish began to contradict again, so angrily that one might have thought Naumoff's words had touched a sore place, hidden even from himself. Cornet Krause turned to Tchish with knitted brows. Dr. Arnoldi looked silently from one to the other with his small, clever eyes, deeply set in their fat sockets; it was impossible to tell which side he took.

CHAPTER XXII

DCHENIEFF had fallen into deep thought during the dispute between Naumoff and Tchish. When Naumoff had finished speaking he no longer listened to Krause and the young student who rushed at his opponent like an angry siskin, but began to listen to an inner voice, which suddenly spoke in his soul. This madman had awakened something morbid in him. Some frightful spectre seemed to be lurking behind every tree of the green wood.

Mishka, who was sitting beside Dchenieff, looking across to the river bank, suddenly started and began to fidget uneasily with heightened colour. Involuntarily Dchenieff followed the direction of his eyes. At the same moment all his reflections vanished and a wave of blood rushed to his head.

Between the white trunks of the birches, clearly as in a picture, could be seen the sandy bank, the smooth water shimmering rosily in the evening light, with Genitchka's red dress carelessly thrown on the sand, and she herself standing naked at the brink of the water.

It had probably not occurred to her that she could be seen. She stood motionless on the sand, faintly irradiated by the rays of the setting sun, her shapely arms crossed behind her head, and her fingers thrust into her dark hair. The soft curve of her supple back bent slightly inwards in an easy graceful position, and her head was thrown far back, as though she could not take her eyes off something in the distance on the further bank.

Dchenieff felt everything contract within him, and she alone held his eyes, which seemed to be inflamed by the momentary excitement and rapture, by the naked, flushed figure with dark hair on the grey-brown sand.

He came to himself again at once when he noticed that the others were looking at him. Arbusoff's eyes especially rested upon him with an inscrutable look.

"Just look, the artist can't take his eyes off her," he said so loudly that all the others could hear.

Dchenieff reddened violently. There was something insulting in Arbusoff's tone, and he loathed the thought they would all see her. But when Krause and Trenieff turned round, there was no longer anyone on the bank. The river darkened softly, the circles in the water faded away and mists had settled on the further shore. The sun had set.

Genitchka soon appeared. The cold water had flushed her cheeks ; she was smiling. Her whole body glowed with freshness.

"Oh ! how lovely it is bathing here ! If you only knew !" she called out gaily from a distance. "Is there any tea for me ? Tea ! I'm dying of thirst."

They brought her a glass. Eugenia Samoilovna drank it in little sips, leaning across the table and looking up at them all with her dewy eyes.

"What were you arguing about so loudly ?" she asked.

"About the destiny of man," answered Tchish ironically, looking round mockingly at Naumoff.

"Oh ! about destiny," laughed Eugenia Samoilovna, "that's splendid. Let's argue about our own fates instead, though. Do you know, my mother was a gipsy. . . . I can tell fortunes. Would you like me to tell you yours ?"

"I can tell yours myself," answered Davidenko. "Show me your hand."

"Can you really ?"

"Yes I can, if I say I will," said the student, seizing her small hand with its rosy polished nails. They all looked involuntarily at the tiny palm with the funny intricate lines.

"You won't marry !" Davidenko made a solemn face. "You'll live to be a great age—a hundred. . . . You'll have love-affairs. . . . Husbands . . ."

"What ? Husbands ?" cried Genitchka, laughing loudly. "You've just said I shouldn't marry."

"That means not marrying. . . ." Davidenko's opinion was unshaken. "But you will have husbands. One, two, three, four, seven, ten, fifteen, twenty-two."

"There's a piece of impudence !" Genitchka freed her hand and shook with laughter.

" Well, is it my fault if the lines say so ? "

The tall Cornet Krause went over to Naumoff, who was pacing silently up and down at the edge of the glade.

The pile of wood, which had only been smoking before, cast an uncertain dancing light among the dark shadows of the birches. The cornet's face seemed to make strange grimaces in its red reflection.

" Pardon me," he said coolly to Naumoff, " but I should like to discuss your ideas in more detail."

For the second time Naumoff looked at him searchingly.

" What is it you want to know ? " he asked curtly.

" Not now; later on," replied the cornet hurriedly, and he turned away. Naumoff looked after him superciliously.

Darkness fell slowly. The birches had merged into a dark mass and the gentle glade had become a dense primeval forest. At the tables faces were lit up and glowed strangely, and black outlines hid the light of the candles, which burnt pallidly under glass shades.

Eugenia Samoilovna ran round laughing and shouting, and flirted with the men. Her red dress was black in the shadows, and in the light of the wood fire it suddenly flamed up like a stain of blood. The gay voices rang through the wood.

" Look, look ! " cried Mishka out of the darkness. From the steep slope they caught sight of great bonfires far away in the village. Voices floated across the river. They were singing, and here in the distance the melody gave an impression of deep sadness. The flames of the bonfires leapt up and disappeared or turned to little sparkling stars.

" What's that ? Oh ! how beautiful ! " cried Eugenia Samoilovna when she had reached the extreme edge of the slope.

" Of course, it's Midsummer Eve to-night ! " cried Davidenko. " Shall we jump over bonfires too ? Start away, Mishka ! "

" No, I'll tell you what," said Genitchka imperiously, " let's go to the village. I've never seen the fires on Midsummer Eve."

" Jump across the river," said Davidenko teasingly. " Now then : one . . . two . . . "

"We can cross over," interrupted Arbusoff. "There's a ferry here."

"Do let's go, do let us. Dearest . . . I love you . . ." Genitchka seized his hand in her delight.

"Look at that now! You love me, do you?" Arbusoff smiled sourly. "Pavel," he shouted through the wood. "Call the ferry-boat up!"

They heard the coachman run down the bank, stumbling and slipping, and shout across the river. "Hi! Ferry over!"

Confused sounds floated across from the opposite bank.

"Come here a minute, Davidenko!" cried Mishka.

The big student went to the edge of the slope, put his hands to his mouth and shouted so loudly that they heard the echo from the further bank.

"Hallo, hallo. . . . Come along. . . ."

"Now then you. . . . You're enough to deafen anyone," laughed Genitchka.

"Ah . . . ah . . . ah . . ." came the answer again.

"What voices," remarked Arbusoff incidentally.

A black object moved silently from the opposite bank, and slowly began to cleave the water, which seemed to have grown momentarily bright.

"How dreadful that looks," said Eugenia Samoilovna softly.

The ferry-boat grew darker and increased in size imperceptibly, while the band of clear water between it and the bank became steadily narrower. They could hear the rattle of the cable and the rough shouts of the ferrymen.

They all began to go down the bank. Eugenia Samoilovna, who was laughing loudly again, nearly fell down the slope.

"Help. . . . I'm falling," she cried.

"Give me your hand," said Davidenko in his deep voice, and rolled up to her like a bear.

The black mass of the ferry-boat swayed creaking to the bank. Laughing and joking they scrambled on to the rotten boards, which gave beneath their feet. Dark indistinguishable forms of peasants grasped the tow-ropes. The ferry-boat creaked more loudly and the band of bright water between it and the bank increased.

"Are you sure we shan't get drowned?" asked Eugenia Samoilovna, looking anxiously at the cold surface, ruffled by the ruddy glow from the bonfires with the blue stars circling in its depths.

Nearer and more plainly the singing rang out, and already they could catch isolated fragments of a Little Russian song. The deep chanting of the basses was dominated by a woman's clear voice. The flames curled up into the darkness with twisted tongues and illuminated the peasants' huts that looked out from the river bank on to the black water.

The song ended abruptly as the party approached the bonfires. Inquisitive faces peered from every side at these gentlefolk who had come from goodness knew where, and strange eyes, whose expressions were hostile in the fire-light, flashed at them.

"Now, what's this?" said Eugenia Samoilovna slowly, bitterly disappointed. "We have frightened them."

The forsaken bonfires burnt down quickly. The lads and girls, handsome and strangely wild-looking with their garlands, continued to stare at the visitors, without moving or speaking a word. The latter crowded together in a small group, equally incongruous in their fine clothes in the midst of the strange nocturnal surroundings, were at a loss to know what to do, and felt just as ill at ease. Davidenko was the first to come to himself.

"Now then, ladies and gentlemen, are you rooted to the spot? Let's begin to jump. . . . Now, Eugenia Samoilovna. . . ."

The young woman laughed and hid behind the men.

"Now, what's this? . . . Now . . . Mishka, off you go!" cried Davidenko.

"You begin," said Mishka modestly.

The big student took a run, leapt up and jumped over the bonfire. Light as a feather, little Mishka took a flying leap after him.

"Now then, Eugenia Samoilovna . . . really! . . . This won't do," gasped Davidenko, emerging from the darkness.

She laughed. The desire to imitate him shone in her eyes, battling with her timidity.

Tall Krause pushed his way forward, walked with an expression of self-importance to a pile, raised his slanting

brows irresolutely and then stepped over the fire like a crane. They all laughed.

Suddenly, as if somebody had given her a push, Eugenia Samoilovna ran lightly towards the fires, her dress caught up so that her slender black ankles were visible. A red glow fell on her face, the fire crouched low for a moment, a gleam of white flashed above the stockings and she vanished with gay triumphant laughter in the smoke of the bonfire, which flamed up again at once.

"Bravo, bravo, bravo," cried Davidenko, Trenieff, Mishka and the others.

As though a barrier had suddenly broken down, the peasant-girls flew after Genitchka, one behind the other, their skirts fluttering, showing their bare legs almost to the waist. One of the boys jumped, then Davidenko again, and behind him little excited Mishka shot like lightning. Eugenia Samoilovna ran and leapt, fell down and laughed, her cheeks flushed, her dress disarranged, her hair dishevelled. The lads collected brushwood and the fire burnt up again brightly. Two small boys had taken a leap from opposite sides, and colliding, had almost fallen into the fire. Loud laughter rang through the wood, smoke and sparks ascended to the heavens whence the stars looked down cold and still.

At last they grew weary. Eugenia Samoilovna threw herself panting full length on the grass ; "I can't go on any longer," she gasped.

CHAPTER XXIII

ONCE again the ferry-boat glided over the dark, cold water. The bonfires paled in the distance and the song died away.

After the excitement, the noise and movement, the night seemed strangely beautiful and solemn. The stars glimmered calmly, the river lapped mysteriously. From the bank came the sound of the snorting of horses and from time to time the tinkle of bells on Arbusoff's troika.

"It's time to go home," cried Dr. Arnoldi as the young people alighted, tired and happy. "Well, was it jolly?" he asked Eugenia Samoilovna kindly.

"Oh! so nice, Doctor. Why didn't you come with us? I wish you had."

"It doesn't matter, I've had a glass of beer here," he answered quietly.

"But I don't want to go home," said the young woman plaintively, like a child being sent to bed.

"I'll tell you what," proposed Davidenko, "let the carriages follow, and we'll walk home."

It was difficult to find the way through the wood in the darkness. Where they were least expected the dark trees loomed like ghosts, holes were discovered where they had thought the path was even; they stumbled and laughed the whole time. Then they came out at the edge of the wood and went across the field. The wind of the Steppes began to fan their faces, gently and persistently.

"Oh, how lovely!" Eugenia Samoilovna, who was walking in front with Davidenko and Dchenieff, commented continually. "So beautiful that one couldn't wish for anything better."

But after a moment's pause she added: "I'll tell you what. Let's talk about what we would each rather have even than to-night . . . our heart's desire . . . what everyone would like to have from life."

"I . . ." began Davidenko in his determined bass.

"No, wait, I'll tell you myself," Eugenia Samoilovna

interrupted him. "What you would like? You would like to be strong, stronger than any one in the world, to throw them down—what does one say?—to bring them to their knees."

"Now, I say," replied Davidenko, offended. "You are taking me too, too . . ."

"Oh yes," Genitchka laughed loudly. "I beg your pardon. You desire victory for the Revolution and the liberation of the people, don't you? Have I guessed right? How did I manage to think of it at once? And M. Trenieff would like his moustache to grow like that birch tree over there."

They all laughed. Trenieff in embarrassment twirled his moustache and thought bitterly: "How far she is from the truth!"

"Dr. Arnoldi would like to be left in peace, M. Tchish wants everyone to become socialists, Sachar Maximitch to eat up the whole world to the very last morsel. Serge Nicolaievitch wants . . ."

"You!" whispered Dchenieff so softly that only she could hear it.

"What cheek!" answered Genitchka quickly, without the least embarrassment.

"What did he say?" asked Davidenko inquisitively.

"Nothing . . . nonsense . . ." cried Genitchka hastily, but there was a note of satisfaction in her voice.

"M. Naumoff," she continued, "would like . . ."

"Everyone to snuff out," cried Tchish from the darkness.

"That's right—up to a point," said Naumoff calmly.

"Now that's too cruel," laughed Genitchka. "What for . . . when it's so nice to be alive?"

"And Krause wants to shoot himself," cried Mishka suddenly.

It seemed in the darkness as though their voices and words were not their own, which gave a pleasant feeling of easiness very conducive to nonsense. They separated involuntarily, some lingering far behind, and their cries and laughter were heard all over the field.

Dchenieff walked a little way behind Davidenko and Genitchka. He could see the vague outlines of her graceful figure, which swayed as she walked; her neck gleamed

white under her black hair. Dchenieff gazed at the shimmering spot, and wished he could think of something clever to say that would excite her. He felt that she would be willing to listen to a great deal at this moment. When Davidenko suddenly turned towards Tchish and entered upon a discussion with him he quickly overtook her and said softly, trembling inwardly :

“ Eugenia Samoilovna, weren’t you afraid someone might see you while you were bathing ? ”

“ What a question ! ” She turned quickly towards him, looking straight into his eyes with a curious expression. Dchenieff did not avert his gaze and for a minute they looked at one another in silence. Then something sped across her eyes like lightning—perhaps a blush. Genitchka seemed to see herself in his eyes, as in a mirror, naked and unprotected from his shameless, covetous gaze.

“ I’m not afraid of anything,” she said suddenly, as though challenging him. She tossed her head, laughed and ran on.

“ Doctor, Doctor ! what’s become of you ? Why do you leave me alone ? ” Genitchka’s voice sounded strange to herself, she felt her nostrils quivering.

Only when they had reached the carriages while everyone was discussing who should drive together, did Dchenieff succeed in reaching Genitchka’s side. The fat doctor had thrown himself down groaning in a corner and took no notice of either of them.

“ You come with me, Serge . . . come,” cried Arbusoff in the distance.

“ I’m coming,” answered Dchenieff, stepping back quickly. “ Well, good-bye till next time ! ” Smiling, he stretched out both hands to Eugenia Samoilovna.

She looked at him piercingly, as though to impress his manly, handsome face on her memory, and gave him both her hands with a determined movement :

“ Good-bye ! ”

Dchenieff held her small, strong hands tightly.

“ I did see you,” he said meaningfully.

Eugenia Samoilovna blushed slightly.

“ Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself,” she said defiantly, as though struggling with her own confusion.

Dchenieff was seized by a frenzy of audacity.

"No reason to be ashamed . . . none at all," he replied, showing his white teeth, "if you only knew how beautiful you are." His voice trembled with suppressed emotion.

"Do you think so?" asked the young woman seriously in the most matter-of-fact tone. Then, suddenly laughing, she drew her hands away, jumped on to the step and cried: "Well, good-bye!"

The horses started off.

Dchenieff hurried across to Arbusoff full of an exuberant strength and youthful hope which he felt in every nerve of his body. His brain was in a whirl.

CHAPTER XXIV

LISA, in a thin low-necked white dress, a muslin scarf on her fair hair, stood in the middle of the studio, looking wonderfully at a painting.

She saw these strange surroundings for the first time, and she was alone with a man for the first time. She felt ill at ease, although everything interested her.

She took pains only to look at the picture and not to observe Dchenieff, but she pulled the ends of her scarf in her confusion and a fleeting blush of excitement came and vanished on her cheeks.

Dchenieff was standing behind her. Close to him was her slender, bare, slightly sunburnt neck, and where the bodice ended was a white line of her fresh body. Whenever Lisa moved the soft curve of her back was visible under the thin dress. He was fanned by the perfume of the girlish figure as fresh as from a bath.

Now and then, as though conscious of his covetous glances, she looked round, but as soon as she met his eyes she turned her head away.

"Well . . . do you like it ?" asked Dchenieff.

Lisa looked at him over her shoulders and replied with naive enthusiasm :

"Oh yes ! How beautiful ! How lucky you are."

Dchenieff saw her red, fresh lips tempting him irresistibly to kiss them. No doubt a dangerous fire was burning in his eyes, for Lisa turned hastily to the picture again.

"Do leave it now. You've been looking long enough. Sit down," he said, "or else I shall begin to be jealous of my own pictures."

He thought the girl would be nearer and more approachable as soon as she sat down beside him on the divan and took off her scarf. Lisa probably felt the same, for she was afraid to sit down, and avoided his eyes.

"No, I only came for a minute or two. . . . I must go back now."

"Did you really only come to tell me that?" jested Dchenieff tenderly.

She smiled disconcertedly.

"No, but they might want me at home. I said I wouldn't be long."

"Are you afraid of papa and mamma?" he laughed.

"I'm afraid of nobody," replied Lisa, reddening.

"Nobody or nothing?" Dchenieff half-closed his eyes.

"Nothing," she answered obstinately, blushing more than ever.

"Really? Oh, my brave girl! . . . Well, now you must prove it. . . . Come and sit with me a little!"

He stretched out his hand and fingered the light scarf on her hair. As though alarmed at his touch she took the scarf off, thinking to keep him at arm's length.

"Very well . . . but what shall we do now?" she said, sitting down on the sofa.

Without answering, Dchenieff sat down beside her and took her hand gently. She tried to snatch it away, yet involuntarily she grasped his hand in return. Under his fierce embrace she began to tremble, but not knowing how to tear herself away she hid her blushing face on his breast. The movement was eloquent of helplessness and innocence. But Dchenieff was possessed by one thought only, and as soon as she could no longer see his face he smiled triumphantly to himself. Coaxingly he tried to raise her head, and finding that he was unsuccessful he kissed her persistently on her bare neck, under the fair, fragrant locks.

"Don't," she whispered; and involuntarily she clung more closely to him, her head still on his breast.

Dchenieff kissed her bare throat passionately, as though through the contact of his lips with the fresh skin he might realise something of that beauty which was not yet his.

"Don't . . . you needn't do that," whispered Lisa.

Dchenieff grew hot. He felt his whole body expand, and his head was burning. His hand glided imperceptibly along her shoulder and, as though he only meant to bring her closer to him, he gently pressed her soft, rounded breast. At first the girl did not understand his meaning, but when she realised she tore herself away and asked sadly:

“ Why that ? ”

Her obstinacy vexed him. This simple girl was resisting him longer than he had expected. He knew that it would end, sooner or later, as it had done with others.

“ I love you,” he said, all the tenderness of which he was capable in his voice.

“ Why do you say that ? ” asked Lisa, still sadly, but yet with timid hope. “ Because it isn’t true.”

“ It’s the truth.” Her helplessness failed to move him. Obsessed by one idea, he hardly knew what he was saying, and under cover of speech he tried to take hold of her again.

“ You only want one pleasure more,” said Lisa, hiding her face.

“ Why should I want only that ? ” said Dchenieff, raising her head and seeking her lips. With secret, cruel joy he noticed that she no longer feared his hand on her breast. He had succeeded in raising her face slightly, and before she could get away he pressed his hot lips on her fresh, dewy mouth. She started back, but his lips were firmly pressed on hers, his strong arms held her as in a vice, clasping her passionately to him. Overcome by his strength and persistence the girl ceased to resist and closed her eyes, dazed by his clinging, ardent kisses.

Suddenly she was struck with terror. She tore herself away by main force and jumped up. Dchenieff got up too, a dark red flush on his face, his hair clinging to his brow.

“ It’s time to go,” she said, hurriedly looking round for her scarf. Dchenieff realised that he had been too hasty. She was frightened and might escape.

“ So you don’t love me ? ” he asked sadly.

Lisa looked at him, and in her innocent grey eyes shone a love so tender and so sad that Dchenieff’s brain reeled afresh.

“ You don’t love me, you certainly don’t love me,” he repeated emphatically, grasping her bare, rounded elbows. She drew her arms back silently, looking at him reproachfully.

Then she began slowly putting on her scarf.

“ You’re not offended, are you ? ” he asked.

“ Should I have kissed a man I didn’t love ? ” she an-

swered proudly, and she seemed all at once to be no longer naive and young, but a splendid, strong woman.

Dchenieff found no reply.

"Why did you say that?" continued the girl, as though unable to compose herself and recover from the shock.
"You know it isn't true."

"Then why do you torture me?"

"How?" Lisa raised her innocent eyes.

"Don't you know that a man wants to possess the woman he loves entirely . . . her body . . . everything?" said Dchenieff, his teeth clenched with the eagerness of desire.
"Don't you know that?"

"I know," answered the girl softly, her head drooping.

"Well?"

Lisa did not reply at once. She looked down, ashamed of the words that trembled on her lips.

"Well . . . ?" repeated Dchenieff.

"And then?" asked the girl scarcely audibly, covering her face with her hands. A mocking light came into Dchenieff's eyes. How many times he had heard that question!

"You fear . . . consequences?" he asked cautiously. The girl nodded her head and buried her face still more deeply in her hands.

"There won't be any, if I don't wish it," he said emphatically, as though he were weighing each word, that its abruptness might not alarm her.

Suddenly the girl began to tremble all over, swaying to and fro as though hardly able to endure the close air.

"I must go. . . . I can't. . . . Leave me alone," she murmured quite beside herself, and she tried to pass him and reach the door.

"Well then, go . . . altogether . . ." he replied brutally. He knew quite well that it would not be for long.

"Good-bye," said Lisa, and went out.

Dchenieff reflected a moment and then followed her. The garden seemed as fresh to Lisa as if she had come out of a dark, hot oven. She looked round smiling, her glance begging him to forgive her obstinacy. Dchenieff smiled back.

"Well, good-bye, you wilful girl," he said tenderly, taking her hand and kissing it.

As if to reward him, she did not withdraw it as usual.
“Listen,” she said, raising her head.

He heard the regular tolling of a bell.

“They are tolling for a death. Someone is dead!” said the girl suddenly with great solemnity.

“Well, never mind. . . . We mean to live,” he answered carelessly.

Lisa looked at him; she smiled lovingly and tenderly.

“Good-bye,” she whispered, adding almost inaudibly, “My dear one. . . .”

Then she turned round and ran out of the gate, holding the scarf round her hair with one hand.

CHAPTER XXV

OLD professor Ivan Ivanovitch was dead.

About three days before his death he relapsed into complete silence, and neither Dr. Arnoldi's visits nor the terrified Polina Grigorievna's anxiety could induce him to utter a sound. It was as though some invisible wall had been erected between him and life, shutting him off for ever from every living interest. The last incommunicable struggle between Life and Death took place behind that wall.

If he were asked a question, the old man answered curtly and quite sensibly, hardly confusing his words at all. One might have thought he had at last regained consciousness and with it the comprehension of some terrible secret that he must hide in his soul, always on his guard lest he should betray it in speech. He sat for hours together in the arm-chair, giving no trouble; his trembling head buried in his hands, as though turned to stone. He meditated.

Polina Grigorievna could not do enough for him. As though conscious of his approaching end, she had suddenly forgotten everything else, lost all her weariness and was full of love and pity. And when Ivan Ivanovitch sat up at night, a small white figure, she kept an eye on him, but pretended to be asleep and did not say a word or make him lie down again, but left him to his own devices. Besides, she only needed to move for Ivan Ivanovitch to lie down again hastily and, as it were, furtively. But no sooner did she close her eyes and hold her breath than he sat up again cautiously, looked at her furtively, took up the same position again, and began quickly to move his sunken lips.

It was a long time before Polina Grigorievna divined that he was praying. This was such an unlooked-for event that it seemed to her as if the face of the world had changed.

During all the forty years they had lived together she had never before seen Ivan Ivanovitch pray. He never went to church, he laughed at religion, scoffed at the priests. At first the mentally restricted woman had been alarmed by

these attacks on God and religion, believing that God would punish him. She had gradually grown accustomed to it, and under his influence her own faith lost its fervour, and religion with its priests, churches, crosses and services faded away from her life like some strange abstraction with which she had nothing more in common. Nobody would ever have believed that Ivan Ivanovitch with his quick, clear brain could have revised his opinion of prayer, life after death, and God.

Now he had become another being. A little withered old man sat on Ivan Ivanovitch's bed and prayed to God in the stillness of the night so that no living soul might see him, alone with his incommunicable thoughts.

Once Polina Grigorievna saw him look round hurriedly in every direction and then furtively and clumsily make the sign of the cross. And as though all at once he had grasped its meaning, he constantly crossed himself, pressing his trembling hands every time closely to his forehead, breast and shoulders. His lips moved, his head shook, and Polina Grigorievna heard isolated fragments of the hasty whispering :

“ Lord have mercy upon me in Thy great goodness. Lord have mercy upon me . . . ”

But all in vain were his helpless efforts to recall the lost prayers of childhood to his memory. They were forgotten. Sorrowfully and with powerless tears Ivan Ivanovitch repeated the same words over and over again : “ Lord have mercy upon me in Thy great goodness.”

Polina Grigorievna had said nothing to him next day. She was aware of a mysterious secret in these nightly prayers that no strange hand might profane. But fear had taken possession of her and she looked at him full of anxiety. And the second night before his death the same thing was repeated in a strange and bewildering manner.

The lamp, which was never extinguished at night, was burning dimly. Darkness lurked in the neighbouring rooms. Polina Grigorievna had crept quietly under the bedclothes.

Ivan Ivanovitch lay quite still for nearly two hours, his head deeply sunk on his pillows, his face upturned and his bony dying hands stretched out on the quilt. She did not know whether he was asleep or awake, she only felt that something drew near and increased, filling the room and op-

pressing the imagination. Polina Grigorievna was petrified with fear and dared not make a movement. A strange chill crept over her feet, up to her heart and touched her brain with long, icy fingers. She tried to cry out, to call Ivan Ivanovitch, but the words stuck in her throat and only her heart beat with wild, furious rapidity.

Suddenly Ivan Ivanovitch moved. He raised his trembling white head softly, as from the grave, and turned his dim eyes on Polina Grigorievna. He looked at her long and fixedly. The silence watched each minute jealously that it might not come to an end too soon.

Then Ivan Ivanovitch raised himself in bed and listened again, but as all was still except for the singing and ringing in his ears he made a tremendous effort and got his thin legs out of the bed.

He tried to move them, but was unable to do so. He supported himself laboriously with his hands on the edge of the bed, his whole body swaying to and fro; finally he reached the ground trembling, and began to rise. Not till then did Polina Grigorievna notice the direction of his glances. In a corner hung a long-forgotten image, a relic of the past, with a small green cut-glass lamp before it which was never lighted.

Ivan Ivanovitch looked round once more at his wife's bed, tried to kneel down, but was unable to keep his balance and fell heavily to the ground. With his bony fingers he firmly clasped a chair.

Some mysterious power held back the cry in Polina Grigorievna's throat. As though she felt that no one ought to see, she closed her eyes mechanically.

Ivan Ivanovitch moved gently. And suddenly a passionate, half-imbecile murmur filled the room:

"Our Father which art in heaven . . . Hallowed be Thy name . . . Thy kingdom come . . . Thy will be done in earth as it is in heaven . . . Give us this day our daily bread, and forgive us our trespasses as we . . . forgive those that trespass against us . . . In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost . . . Lord have mercy upon me in Thy great goodness . . . Forgive me my trespasses . . . have mercy, have mercy . . . have mercy upon me!"

Polina Grigorievna opened her eyes, but her tears prevented her from seeing more than a blurred white shape on the floor. She heard a strange, bony sound. Ivan Ivanovitch was silent. The white shape moved as if trying to creep forward. The bony sound was heard again and was repeated several times, as if Ivan Ivanovitch were bowing down to the ground, often and irregularly, and striking it with his forehead. He groaned. Polina Grigorievna understood in a moment that he was trying to rise and could not do so, slipping each time and knocking his head against the floor.

She rushed towards him despairingly, lifted him up and with unsuspected strength laid him on the bed. Ivan Ivanovitch muttered to himself, and looked at her with plaintive, guilty eyes.

"You see I . . . wanted to pray. I hadn't prayed for a long time. I wanted to have another try." His head shook. He was ashamed, and clung to her breast like a little child seeking protection.

"I'm in a dreadful state of mind . . . dreadful, Polietschka . . . I'm dying," he murmured.

They sat together on the bed, both weeping; both small, grey-haired, in white linen. Suddenly she was filled with a new hope.

"Do you know. . . . Let us send for the miraculous image to-morrow. . . . Let us have prayers," she said, stroking his bald, palsied skull with her trembling hands.

Eager expectation filled the house next day from early morning. The rooms were cleaned and swept, Ivan Ivanovitch was dressed in a new frock-coat and was a prey to restlessness and timid hope.

And when the image was placed on the white tablecloth and the candles were lighted in front of it, the red-haired priest, the same one who had been turned out into the fields by Arbusoff, wearing a light-coloured stole, began to read and chant. Ivan Ivanovitch crawled down from the arm-chair, fell on his knees and wept.

The sun shone through the windows and poured a golden light into the room. The voices of the priest and the sacristan rang out loudly, and narrow wreaths of incense circled gently. In the light, in the smoke and the sunbeams

the hard, joyless countenance of the image, blackened by time, grew quite dark.

Polina Grigorievna wept, Ivan Ivanovitch wept, the pregnant Lida wept, but there was joy and hope in their tears. They seemed all at once to realise that there was no other protection but the radiant and almighty power which was descending out of the heavens in the rays of the golden sun shining upon the black image.

Ivan Ivanovitch looked up at the image with wide-open tearful eyes. All the strength of his fading life, all the terror and grief of the last dark nights were concentrated in this quiet, pleading gaze. And when the voice of the priest filled the room with words of inspired beauty Ivan Ivanovitch's tears fell faster. In that moment he absolved his whole life, foreswore his arrogant intellect, abandoned science and reason. In deep humility alone with his tears he implored the unknown Power to spare him and be merciful to him.

The image was taken away. Red-haired Father Nicolas rolled up his sleeves and talked to Polina Grigorievna on topics of the day. Then he wished the sick man recovery and went away. The bluish clouds of incense circled upwards and floated through the open window.

Ivan Ivanovitch sat on the divan, his lips still trembling, but the light of an intense faith, pure as a child's, shone in his tearful eyes. His whole face was radiant with inward happiness. The sunlight had reached his head and fell on it, warm and caressing. He looked at Polina Grigorievna and his daughter Lida joyfully and shyly, as though he saw them for the first time.

"Now then, God be thanked. . . . Now you will recover." The old woman stroked his thin hands hopefully. Smilingly she looked at Ivan Ivanovitch, the tears still trembling on his lashes.

Dr. Arnoldi came, heavy and unwieldy, with his grumpy, shrunken face. Ivan Ivanovitch said to him :

"Well, I've been praying. . . . What do they call it now . . . received the Holy Communion. . . . Ah, Doctor, a good thing, eh ? "

"A very good thing ! " answered Dr. Arnoldi, and it was impossible to tell from his expression whether he scoffed or believed.

They sat talking for a long time, but actually only the doctor, Lida and Polina Grigorievna spoke; Ivan Ivanovitch sat on the sofa among his white pillows and looked round joyfully.

Then he grew tired and asked to lie down. The doctor looked at him attentively and as he was leaving said to Lida:

"I shall be at home till four o'clock, and later at Rasdolskaia's. . . . Send for me if necessary."

The meaning of the words was lost upon Lida, who replied cheerfully:

"Very well, but that's hardly likely. Papa is much better."

Ivan Ivanovitch fell asleep. Lida and Polina Grigorievna sat in the next room chatting softly. Suddenly it struck Lida that her father was sleeping longer than usual and that his breathing was no longer audible. She became anxious.

"Oughtn't we to wake him? Wouldn't it be better? . . . I think it's better to wake him."

Then the two women bent over Ivan and watched him perplexed. Their quiet, peaceful relief had vanished as completely as if it had never existed. Not a muscle of the sleeper's face moved, and the grey hair was still as neatly arranged as it had been in the morning.

"What is it?" asked Polina Grigorievna, who could not believe her eyes.

"We must wake him," whispered Lida anxiously. "Dreadful. We shall have to send for the doctor."

"Wake him . . . wake him."

"Or isn't it necessary? Let him sleep. . . . But what is it? . . . I'm going to wake him."

Then there was a sudden commotion on account of the motionless figure in the black frock-coat. The servant ran to fetch the doctor. Lida at last made up her mind to feel the pulse in the dead blue hand, cold and yielding like soft india-rubber. She began to shake the body in uncontrollable terror.

"Papa, Papa," she cried. "Wake up . . . Papa!"

There was no answer.

"Ivan Ivanovitch!"

Suddenly Ivan Ivanovitch opened his eyes. Neither his limbs nor his face moved, but the eyelids opened terribly

wide. They were no longer the eyes of a living creature. They were clear as glass and looked inwards. He saw nothing more ; it was as though he had been recalled by force from some region whither his soul had preceded him. Horrified by his ghastly expression Lida stepped back.

" Oh ! " she cried. " Mamma ! "

" What is it, Ivan Ivanovitch ? " Polina Grigorievna flung her arms round him as though to hold him back from the edge of a precipice.

The dying eyes turned towards her and fixed that same transparent gaze upon her face.

" Ivan Ivanovitch ! " shrieked the old woman, unable to endure the horror of it.

Suddenly his mouth opened, and in the black cavity the hard tongue trembled in a last vain effort. His face was distorted by terrible convulsions, his eyes dilated in their sockets, and Ivan Ivanovitch laughed, so horribly and savagely that the two women recoiled.

For a few seconds he looked quickly round the room, his gaze flitting from one object to another. Then his breast heaved, he uttered a hoarse cry and was still. Instantly his face changed : the rigidity of death gave him a mask of stone, closed his eyes, sharpened his nose. His chin receded below the black cavity of his mouth.

And henceforth he who had been called Ivan Ivanovitch no longer existed, he who had lived, suffered, thought and loved himself.

A little grey-haired woman rocked herself to and fro beside the body. There were all kinds of preparations to be made ; Dr. Arnoldi moved about quickly, but the corpse lay solemn and unmoved, only nodding its head occasionally, as though rebuking people for their unnecessary agitation.

The great bell in the cathedral tower began to toll heavily and majestically. The sound rolled along in black, muffled tones and died far away in the Steppes behind the houses and gardens where the living forgot for a moment their troubles, their gossip and their occupations to raise their heads and say : " Someone is dead."

Then the small bells began, faint and melodious, the larger ones rang with long pauses and again the heavy big bell tolled brazen and black and muffled.

CHAPTER XXVI

THE tall Cornet Krause and the little student Tchish were standing at Dchenieff's studio door, when Lisa's light figure appeared at the end of the garden path. Tchish was the first to see her, and recognised her at once. He glanced quickly at Dchenieff, then looked away and began hastily :

" Well, now, good-bye till next time—but what that fellow says is utter drivel—good-bye."

" You only talk like that," declared the cornet, who had observed neither Lisa nor Dchenieff's excitement nor Tchish's remarkable haste, " because you don't understand his theory. I admit it contains several errors of logic, but as a whole it is a powerful and very significant outlook. . . ."

" Very well, very well. We can discuss it some other time . . . let's go," interrupted Tchish, looking round involuntarily.

" No, pardon me . . . it's very interesting," continued Krause. " Apart from the fact that he does not actually advocate suicide, due, in my opinion, to cowardice, his tendency is . . ."

" Well now, do stop . . . let us be off," called Tchish irritably, and he hastily took leave of Dchenieff, who looked away and turned rather red.

At last Krause noticed that something was the matter. He looked earnestly from Tchish's embarrassed face to Dchenieff's restless eyes, raised his eye-brows and said :

" Well, let's go."

Dchenieff parted from them with exaggerated friendliness ; he would have liked to fling them down the steps. He went back to the studio and waited impatiently. He could hear the contemptuous note in Krause's voice as he asked some question, and Tchish's quiet, bitter reply. Then the gate closed and there was silence. No doubt Lisa had hidden, or turned back again, for there was no sound.

Dchenieff looked at the clock. It was five, and at six

Eugenia Samoilovna was coming. He had arranged it on purpose that they should meet here, and trembled with excitement at the thought.

These two women maddened him : one was a young, tender girl who would not surrender because her purity shielded her from the final step ; the other, a passionate woman of experience who delayed from obstinacy and the desire to torment him.

The everlasting 'Please don't do that' of the one and the warning, scornful 'Hallo' of the other always repulsed him at the last moment when he thought himself sure of them. Dchenieff had never yet met with such resistance, and it irritated him extremely. Sometimes he hated them so that he would have liked to fling them aside. But the conceit of a man whom women have spoilt would not permit him to give up what he had begun. Then it occurred to Dchenieff to bring the two together. He did not know himself how it would end, but instinctively he felt that it would provide a magnificent entertainment.

Lisa did not come. Dchenieff was just going into the garden when he heard quick, shy steps on the stairs ; then a knock at the door. "Come in," he cried, his voice husky with agitation.

Lisa entered.

She was pale and looked round in dismay. She had hidden behind a bush while Tchish and Krause went past. They must have seen her, for she distinctly heard the cornet whisper :

"Another ? . . . Lucky devil ! "

And Tchish had replied :

"Yes, he has luck. Let's go, let's go. They simply pester him ! "

There was a note in both their voices which alarmed her. She did not know whether she had been seen or not. At first she wanted to go home and not come back again, but she could not find it in her heart to do so, and ran to Dchenieff.

She had really only meant to tell him that she could no longer endure the shame. But as soon as she saw his eyes and his calm, clear brow and heard his familiar, seductive voice, and when his hands took the scarf from her hair, she

grew suddenly weak and clung to him ardently. Dchenieff led her to the sofa and kissed her eyes, which were smiling shyly again, as though asking forgiveness for her weakness.

"Now, don't worry. What is there in it after all. I'm sure they didn't recognise you. So many people come to see me. . . ."

Lisa gradually grew calmer, raised her tear-stained face and said, smiling uneasily :

"It frightened me so. Just think, if they had recognised me."

Terrified, she covered her face with her hands. But suddenly she dropped them, looked at him passionately and cried : "Oh ! when can I be with you always ?"

A light gleamed in Dchenieff's eyes. He stooped and began to kiss her hands.

"That depends on you. . . . I have told you before that I can't chain my life to a woman till I know her. . . . In my opinion real love only begins with complete surrender. . . . That's why there are so many unhappy marriages, because people mate when they hardly know anything of one another."

"You don't love me !" Lisa clenched her fingers in despair.

"Yes, I do love you. But I'll have nothing to do with half-measures in love. You know, I've seen too much, known too many women, to rush headlong into anything."

"But why should I then ?" asked Liss, her pride awakening ; for instinct told her that he was not treating her fairly.

"You are only nineteen !" replied Dchenieff.

This was no answer and did not convince her. She could not believe, in her first great pure love, that she could ever cease to love him or that any doubt whatever could prevent her from confiding her happiness to him. The conversation humiliated her.

Dchenieff, on the contrary, for whom the game acted as a stimulant, wished to prolong the excitement, and affirmed that her obstinacy was a sign that she did not love him, that he was accustomed to possess entirely the women he loved, and that her resistance repelled him.

"You'll make me throw myself away on the first woman I meet before you've done—just to forget you."

Lisa raised her head. "It's all the same then, is it : I or another ? "

"That's true enough," thought Dchenieff involuntarily, but he answered : "If it were really all the same, you don't suppose I should persevere so passionately in my love for you ? "

Lisa's head sank powerless ; she believed it because she wished to, yet felt that it was not true.

At that moment there was a short, sharp knock at the door. Lisa started up, but Dchenieff called out hastily : "Come in ! "

Lisa looked at him with dismay, tried to rise, sat down again and seized his hands, but Dchenieff, who pretended not to notice her agitation, again called : "Come in !" and got up.

"Oh, it's you, Eugenia Samoilovna !" he said in a tone of somewhat exaggerated surprise. "This is indeed a pleasure. . . ."

Eugenia Samoilovna half closed her shining black eyes. There was a gleam of jealousy in them, but she made a resolute gesture of contempt and quickly stepped into the studio.

When Dchenieff introduced the two, Lisa was embarrassed ; Eugenia Samoilovna, on the other hand, was calm and patronisingly friendly.

Dchenieff watched their expressions closely, deeply interested in comparing them. Eugenia Samoilovna hardly looked at him. She turned to Lisa and said in the friendly tone of an older woman :

"You live here, don't you ? . . . Don't you find it very dull ? Everybody seems so uninteresting, so monotonous."

"I'm used to it," replied Lisa shyly, not knowing what to do with her hands.

Eugenia Samoilovna critically regarded her figure, dress, hands and hair, as though to estimate the danger which might lurk in the charms of this little country girl for her rival from town. And all the time she talked on indifferent subjects, as carelessly and amiably as if she were receiving a young girl from the provinces who was in need of her protection. Dchenieff listened to their conversation with a feeling of dissatisfaction not unmixed with a certain

inconvenient shame, to rid himself of which he proposed to Eugenia Samoilovna to show her round the studio.

"Oh, yes . . . show me," she consented superciliously.

To emulate her composure, Lisa rose too and went up to the pictures. They examined the sketches, quietly and amiably, exchanging opinions all the while. Both seemed to disregard Dchenieff. Finally they sat down again and discussed art for about five minutes, until Dchenieff noticed triumphantly that the conversation began to languish, as he had hoped it would. Yet they both prolonged it, as though expecting something to happen. He realised that each was impatiently waiting for the other to go.

Lisa evidently felt it was time for her to go, that her reasons for staying should not become too obvious. But a hidden force restrained her. Every now and then Eugenia Samoilovna cast a rapid glance at her and gave a fresh turn to the uninteresting conversation. Lisa felt this piercing look, but her feet refused to move.

"Well, I must be going," said Eugenia Samoilovna, getting up at length. "Good-bye," and she turned to Lisa with crushing, exaggerated politeness.

Lisa rose too and awkwardly shook hands. She was ashamed to stay, and meant to say that she also was going. But the words stuck in her throat. Dchenieff looked furtively and covetously at them as they took an amiable farewell, though they hated one another and were each ready to surrender to him, if only to annoy the other.

Eugenia Samoilovna's black eyes rested for a moment on Lisa's flushed face. She looked down at once and began to play with the fringes of her muslin scarf. Eugenia Samoilovna turned round and looked carelessly at Dchenieff.

"Come with me," she called over her shoulder, and went quickly towards the door, as though to emphasize her power.

In the hall she stood still and said mockingly :

"Well . . . I think I'm in the way. Now I can set my mind at rest. She is really very nice, but rather simple, just a little provincial girl. Good-bye."

Dchenieff was carried away by her beauty. An uncontrollable longing made his brain reel. He held her hand tightly.

" You are always jeering and tormenting me. . . ."

" And she doesn't ? Well, now all your misery is at an end," she replied, closing her eyes, in a tone of deep compassion. " Now come with me."

" And . . . won't you come any more ? " asked Dchenieff, trembling with anxiety lest she might escape him for ever, while he held the black gloved hand firmly in his.

" What for ? " replied Eugenia Samoilovna scornfully.

" What for ? . . . Well, because I love you." Dchenieff bent down, almost touching her face.

She was silent for a moment, shaking her head almost imperceptibly.

Dchenieff thought she wavered, that she was waiting, that he might dare. Gently, cautiously, almost tentatively he approached his lips to hers.

" Hallo there ! " she said warily, turning her head to one side. " Good-bye ! "

Dchenieff felt himself powerless. In a rage that contracted his throat he accompanied her to the steps.

She had already descended the first one when she suddenly stopped, turned round and smiled disdainfully.

" You're very stupid, my friend," she said unexpectedly, turned away again and went down the steps.

" What . . . why . . . ? " he asked quickly. A vague hope stirred within him.

But Eugenia Samoilovna shook her head.

" Aha ! " she said meaningfully. " Stupid, well—because you are stupid." She laughed defiantly and walked quickly down the path.

Dchenieff followed her with his eyes till she had vanished behind the bushes. Then he turned back into the studio, vexed that Lisa was waiting for him. She seemed insipid and commonplace in comparison with the subtle, clever woman who had just left him.

Lisa was standing before the looking-glass putting on her scarf. He could see the reflection of her burning cheeks and red eyes, with their traces of tears.

" Lisotchka," he said, with a momentary longing to console her, and he tried to embrace her.

" I'm going," she said softly.

But Dchenieff took the scarf away and she did not resist.

He put it on the table and grasped her trembling hands. She looked past him.

"Now, what's the matter?" he asked, as if he were speaking to a fractious child. "Lisotchka!"

"Why did you make me meet that woman. . . . What was it for. . . . Mockery?"

"Where does the mockery come in?" Dchenieff pretended to be greatly surprised. "Can't I introduce you to my acquaintances? And besides, I didn't even know she was coming."

Lisa looked up quickly, but turned away again at once.

"Why do you deceive me. . . . she is your. . . . mistress."

Dchenieff laughed.

"What put that into your head? . . . I've only known her a month. . . . you are really too jealous. . . . a mere acquaintance. . . . It's you I love!"

Coaxingly he tried to draw her to him, but Lisa held back, making a feeble effort to twist her pretty, supple figure.

"It's not true," she said, though hope was trembling in her voice.

"It is true."

She glanced quickly at him again. "True? . . . Oh, well, it's all the same to me. . . . You can go to her."

"Are you jealous?" Dchenieff looked into her eyes with affectionate mockery.

"I shouldn't think of it. What has it to do with me? I have no right to be."

A cruel thought flashed into his mind. "Of course you haven't," he said coldly, dropping her hands.

Lisa started and looked up.

"Yes, of course. . . ." she repeated in a low voice. "I am going. . . . it's time."

Dchenieff quickly pushed off her scarf again.

"You have none," he repeated coldly, enjoying his power over her. "You won't be mine, but I can't behave differently. . . . I love you, but I am a man, and must possess you entirely. . . . It tortures me to have you so near and. . . . and that you don't belong to me. . . ."

Lisa listened with blanched cheeks. Her lips quivered.

"Isn't it really possible . . . to love . . . without that?"

"Not for me, anyhow," said Dchenieff decisively. "I see you in my dreams. . . ."

Lisa blushed. She tried to cover her face with her hands, but could not raise them. Her heart was contracted by grief. She had never loved him as she did at this moment.

"We must make an end of this," said Dchenieff. He bent down to her and his dark eyes seemed to pierce the depths of her soul. These gusts of passion dazed her, and an uncontrollable ardour drew them to one another.

"I can't bear this any longer. Either you give yourself to me to-day, now"—Dchenieff's voice sounded broken—"or I . . . she will not torture me, as you do. . . ."

A last glimmer of pride gave Lisa a momentary strength.

"As you wish," she said coolly.

She took the scarf firmly and began resolutely to tie it on, without looking at him.

Dchenieff sat on the corner of the table and watched her. His desire to hurt her increased, as he looked down at her soft, slightly stooping figure, at her hands, twisted in her scarf, and noticed the indecision in every movement. Though he feared that she might really leave him because he had gone too far, something prevented him from apologising.

It was a long time before Lisa had finished with her scarf. Her movements grew slower, as if she still sought some excuse to stay. But at length the scarf was round her hair, her gloves were on. She stood in front of the glass, her clasped fingers pressed to her lips, deep in thought. There was something so pathetic in the helpless attitude that Dchenieff was moved to pity, but he remained where he was, looking at her in silence.

At last she moved gently, took a couple of steps and went resolutely towards the door.

Dchenieff still kept silence. He was trembling violently.

Lisa stood still at the door, turned quickly round again and gazed at him. He looked her straight in the face without a word. It was a cruel game, of which he was ashamed; but at the same time it interested him more than anything else had ever done.

"Good-bye," said Lisa softly, without lifting her head.

"Good-bye," answered Dchenieff in the voice of a stranger.

She remained where she was, evidently hardly able to stand. She waited. But he did not say a word.

"Good-bye," she repeated, in a tone so full of grief that it went to his heart, and she turned towards the door.

He was silent.

Then Lisa suddenly dropped the hand that had already grasped the door-handle; her stooping figure trembled.

Dchenieff felt himself impelled towards her. He rushed up to her, pulled her back, threw off the scarf, seized her roughly yet tenderly and led her back into the room. Lisa started, and tried to resist, but her hands were limp. He kissed her lips, her tearful eyes, her shoulders, her breast. She submitted meekly. All at once she began to tremble as though she only now realised that she was lost. Once again she tried to get away and to ward him off.

"For God's sake . . . not now . . . later . . . another time," she whispered in an agony of fear.

He held her in a fury, but her hand impeded him, firmly clasping his own. He tried to push her away, slipped, and fell with his face against her soft breast, whose tender coolness soothed his burning cheeks. She had no time to repulse him again.

When she realised that it was all over, she threw back her head, her hair spreading over the end of the divan, and moaned convulsively, throwing her bare arms round his neck.

CHAPTER XXVII

LISA was going away at last.

Dchenieff mechanically arranged the cushions, picked up one that had fallen to the ground, put it back in its place and glanced wearily round the studio.

He was happy and more than satisfied. The last scene of all had touched him.

Lisa was ready to go ; he went to the door with her, worn out by the unrestrained caresses which her submissive humility had made possible. Now he longed for peace and solitude. Even the thought that she would come again oppressed him. He longed to be able to light a cigarette and go out into the garden, leaving the studio where the air was heavy with scent and the perfume of women.

But Lisa did not go at once. She remained standing at the door deep in thought, her clasped fingers on her lips, as before. Dchenieff stood behind her and waited, looking wearily down at her head with the fair, curly, tangled hair. He could not help sympathising with the fearful chaos of despairing thoughts which seethed in the girlish head, bent with fear and shame. He was sorry for her, but his body demanded rest, and he became almost impatient. He felt, too, how ridiculous it was to stand behind her, looking in mute expectancy at her neck.

He was just going to interrupt her thoughts when she suddenly looked back over her shoulder ; a gentle smile played round her lips.

" What is it ? " asked Dchenieff, failing to understand her expression.

She did not answer. Only her eyes shone with such a glow of tender resignation that her whole face was radiant. She stooped gently, took his hand and kissed it. Gently, thankfully and shyly, as though imploring him not to be angry at her weakness in expressing her obedience to her destiny and his will.

And, curiously enough, Dchenieff did not withdraw

his hand, said nothing, was not surprised. He felt that it must be so. Must, because she believed that he was stronger than herself and would protect and save her.

And then Lisa went.

Dchenieff looked wearily round the studio. The evening came. The large window faced north, and while the tops of the distant trees still gleamed golden, the green of the shadows was pale and cool as emeralds. The corners of the studio narrowed. In the blue of twilight the vivid colouring of the pictures paled, the bright folds of drapery and the large body of a stuffed owl over the chimney-piece sank back into the darkness.

Dchenieff recalled the mute, submissive kiss ; he felt uneasy. For the first time in his life he felt a dull dissatisfaction after the delirious caresses. He felt now as though the momentary joy of possession were not worth the sufferings which someone must bear. It could only be because he did not really love Lisa and had merely acted in the excitement of the moment. Had it been otherwise, had he known that bright, wonderful feeling called love, all that had passed must have filled him with joy. He was seized by a longing for that one woman to whom he could give himself up for ever and in whom he would see the whole world, not a casual mistress.

"Rubbish," thought Dchenieff irritably. "Shall I ever cease to see how beautiful and fascinating other women are ? "

He remembered Eugenia Samoilovna and his eyes flashed. And how many Eugenias there are ! The whole world is full of beautiful women, the whole earth is caught in the web of their tender, caressing arms. Not to see them, to give them up for ever, to unite his whole life with one whom he had chosen for some reason would be foolish and dull. And simultaneously the longing for this one love increased. The two irreconcilable feelings crowded in upon Dchenieff in a confusion from which there was no escape.

This mood, menacingly foreshadowing a terrible catastrophe, overpowered him so suddenly that he could not bear to stay in the big studio, filled with mysterious shadows. He took up his hat to go into the garden.

On the way out he remained standing before one of his

pictures, gazing long at the darkening colours. Fields at evening stretched across the canvas in soft tints. Faint lines of mist stole over the mown grass, between high, uneven haycocks. The full moon rose red on the horizon. A strange surprise, almost emotion, filled Dchenieff's soul.

"Did I really do that? How beautiful . . . that is happiness! Everywhere else dirt and misery and boredom, but here in this colossal Art what goodness and purity and beauty!"

And suddenly he thought of Lisa again and felt sorry for her. "Why did she kiss my hand?"

He went out into the garden, took off his hat and began to walk up and down. It was still quite light, but already the air was scented with the dew of evening. He grew gradually calmer. His body felt fresher, his head clearer, the gentle melancholy subsided.

He sat down on a seat and began to hum softly. Then he relapsed into silence again, stroked his soft, curly hair and looked round joyously.

"It's all very beautiful," he thought.

A girl in a blue dress and a shawl, whom he did not know, came out to him from the house. No doubt she had been to the studio, and, not having found him there, had come to look for him in the garden.

"Now what's the matter?" He made a slight gesture, but recollecting at once that it was the maid from Maria Pavlovna's, where Eugenia Samoilovna was staying. A pleasurable curiosity stirred in him.

"What is it?" he asked, without getting up.

"The young lady told me to bring you this letter."

Dchenieff hastily tore open the small envelope.

"Serge Nicolaievitch, do send away your little provincial girl if she is still with you, and come to see us. Can't you really understand that it offends my sense of fitness to see you with the little goose? As a matter of fact, it's all the same to me, but it doesn't suit you, my foolish friend."

The maid, who stood and waited, twisted the corners of her shawl.

Dchenieff re-read Genitchka's letter. The large, arrogant writing recalled her black shining eyes and disdainful, smiling lips. He smiled happily. The vision of Lisa lost all

colour, and grew pale and dim. His tiredness had vanished, he felt as fresh and vigorous as after a cold bath in spring.

"And the answer?" asked the girl, smiling coyly.

Dchenieff cast a rapid glance at the pretty, healthy girl. The smooth white shawl suited her. Her mischievous eyes were black and round as cherries. He had often seen her and taken no special notice of her, but now he felt that she, too, was a woman. He experienced a gay, fleeting desire to make love to her and kiss her, to take her without words or thoughts.

His expression probably betrayed his wishes, for the girl suddenly coloured up and smiled. It was plain enough that she would make no difficulties.

CHAPTER XXVIII

TURNING away from the light one could scarcely see where the trees ended and the dark abyss of the sky began. The tree-tops were lost in remote heights, yet beyond them shone the bright stars. The lamp was burning on a table under the trees and, as always at night, it made everything look bright and festive. From the spot where Eugenia Samoilovna and Dchenieff were standing, they could see the dark outlines of several persons sitting at the table opposite to them; the sharply illuminated faces were those of the pale Cornet Krause, Dr. Arnoldi and Tchish, who was brandishing his arms excitedly. Loud voices floated across to them. They were arguing about something.

But there under the trees were night and silence. In the darkness the branches looked like ghostly hands.

"I don't believe it, I don't believe it," said Eugenia Samoilovna, shaking her head teasingly. The lamp was dimly reflected on her face, which was in mysterious contrast to the surrounding darkness.

"You know quite well it's all the same to you!" replied Dchenieff. "You wouldn't consent to spend your whole life with me. You are too daring and too clever not to understand that. I needn't deceive you. . . . But how all women, even the wisest and most original, love the commonplace! Well, and if I admit that she is my mistress—in my opinion one ought always to renew one's sensations."

"I am not an admirer of violent sensations of the Mormon type," interrupted Eugenia Samoilovna quizzically.

"It's your own fault. . . . It will be your fault if I bind myself to her. You are no longer a young girl and you know that nowadays no man will sigh aimlessly at a woman's feet. Yes, yes, that belongs irrevocably to the past. And we don't want a resurrection of the sweet pastoral idylls. You, too, only want enjoyment, and that's quite natural. You wouldn't stop at one lover either. So don't let's

deceive ourselves. Let us give each other what we want. You're a brave woman!"

His eager, ardent voice flattered her, enveloping her body in an atmosphere of secret desire. But she laughed if off with a toss of her head.

" You know, you're an experienced Don Juan," she said, in a tone of open scorn, which showed how well she had understood him.

" Why ? " Dchenieff blushed slightly.

" Now then ! now then ! " sang Eugenia Samoilovna. " You said yourself I wasn't a little girl. . . . That was naïve, Serge Nicolaievitch."

Something in her voice persuaded Dchenieff that he had really made himself ridiculous by trying to deceive one who was probably better versed in all the tricks and artifices of love than he was.

" How often she'll have heard that," flashed through his mind.

" But what do you mean ? " he asked, in the same tone of conviction, in order not to betray his embarrassment.

" Yes," said Genitchka mysteriously. " Years ago this call to free gratification might have appealed to me. But now it's too late, Serge Nicolaievitch. You must try another ruse ; a little more subtle."

Dchenieff set his teeth. Her inaccessibility, with its seductive mockery, appealed to him so much that at the moment she meant everything to him.

" Or perhaps a little simpler ? " he replied, almost rudely.

" Perhaps," answered Eugenia Samoilovna enigmatically.

Dchenieff thought her eyes sparkled expectantly and without a word he took her in his arms.

She leant back at once, pushing him away with her hands, but she made no attempt to free herself and looked at him with strangely radiant eyes.

" Well ? . . . well ? . . ." stammered Dchenieff hoarsely, trying to bend her lithe figure. His breath came in gasps. But as soon as his lips touched her she tore herself away without an effort.

" That's enough," she said coldly.

He hardly heard and made another movement to seize her, but she stepped back.

"Take care!"

That enraged him. He groaned like an animal bereft of its prey, still feeling the intoxication of her yielding lips on his.

But Eugenia Samoilovna was already standing at a little distance, smoothing her hair.

"You are beginning to get rather dangerous," she said, her voice trembling slightly. "Though I like that!"

She laughed gaily and ran back to the table.

Dchenieff followed her slowly. His body tingled, the dark tree-trunks swam before his eyes.

Already he could hear Naumoff's harsh voice, slightly raised, and Tchish's excited screeching. They were arguing as usual, and involuntarily he paid attention to them.

There was something about Naumoff that compelled every one to listen when he spoke. They felt there was more behind his half-crazy talk than the mere meanderings of an argumentative mind. At that time Dchenieff did not realize why these discussions made such a deep impression on him, and demanded such intense attention. But every time Naumoff spoke he could not avert his gaze from his face and his unnaturally bright eyes.

Coming nearer, Dchenieff [distinguished Tchish's voice : "When Victor Hugo was standing on the barricade, some one offered him a gun. 'You've no weapon, Citizen Hugo,' he said, whereupon Hugo replied : 'Citizen Hugo can die in the cause of freedom, but he cannot kill!'"

"A stupid, thoughtless answer," said Naumoff indifferently.

"Possibly." Tchish laughed with spiteful irony.

"Of course," continued Naumoff, "I understand fighting for liberty and even shedding the last drop of blood. But to die for it—that's silly."

"Well, that's a chance."

"Yes, to be killed accidentally in the cause of liberty is not the same as dying for it. Scores of people have gone to their death for this overrated freedom, which can bring no happiness and never has done, since it has been the cause of revolutions and wars. It grieves me to hear such folly from a man like Victor Hugo. In the mouths of the people I can understand it, and even when a student says that kind

of thing I can admire it. When one sheep jumps into the sea with the whole flock after it, I can understand it perfectly, but when the sheep jump into the water and the shepherd follows, it's not only horrible, but foolish as well."

"According to that, then, you wouldn't climb up the barricade?" remarked Tchish scornfully.

"Oh, why not?" replied Naumoff carelessly. "You can mount the barricade and even fire a shot, but you mustn't expect to bring the moon down from heaven!"

"You are always joking."

Naumoff looked steadily at Tchish.

"I never make jokes and I don't understand them. I say what I think and I always think the same."

"What? That everything is vanity?"

"That's been said a great many times already. You, too, recognize its truth in your heart. It's not for nothing that your face is so nervous, so distraught. I always assert that nothing can bring happiness to the human race, doomed as it is to eternal sorrow. No revolution, no form of government. What's the good of your social construction, when Death looks over everyone's shoulder, when everything we do bears in itself the elements of grief and discontent? One can look Death in the face, perhaps, but let us take Life itself. You can never simplify it. The elixir of immortality is annihilated by the stone that smashes your skull. Equality will sink in the agony of unattainable desires. Whoever is without it imagines the joy of a woman's love, whoever has a wife will die of monotony, whoever has a score of loves will long for one great passion. And even immortality would bore people to extinction. Immortal to-day, immortal to-morrow—they would beg for death."

"Well, what is one to do then?" asked Tchish.

"The best thing of course is to die. That'll bring it to an end, and the sooner, the better."

"So you agree with that altogether now?" said tall Krause suddenly, raising his slanting brows still higher.

Naumoff looked at him.

"That's of no consequence. The great thing is to destroy in people the superstition about life, point out to them that they have no right to protract the senseless comedy. When-

ever I see a pregnant woman, I feel inclined to kill her. If the child lives and begets others in its turn, how many thousands of cripples, of scoundrels, of murderers will be among them, how many will perish in war, how many go mad. What a crime she commits against millions of future wretches. She herself will suffer, tremble for its every breath, die in distress at the thought of its future. And having borne the little flame to the brink of the grave, she leaves it in the world—for what? So that innumerable descendants may curse her memory, crying out amid their tortures: ‘Cursed be the day when my mother bore me! cursed the breasts that nourished me and the hands that carried me . . . better for me if I had never been born!’

“Well, now, you’re just quoting Scripture!” interrupted Tchish.

“That isn’t Scripture,” cried Naumoff excitedly, “that is the truth of life, which you conceal for some reason, trying to make people believe in a golden age of justice, which does not exist. One day you’ll all acknowledge the truth of my words, sooner or later you, too, will balance the joys of your lives against their sorrows!”

Naumoff was silent, tapping the edge of the table with his lean fingers. Nobody spoke, as though waiting for him to continue.

Tchish looked from one to the other and laughed shrilly.

“Upon my word, you’ve terrified us all! Just as if we were all going to be hanged to-morrow! To the devil with such cowardice! And you, my dear friend, are committing a terrible crime: if Fate has given you the wisdom and the power to affect people like this, you ought to lead them forward. Strengthen them in the fight when they lose courage. But you behave as if you were trying to found a suicides’ club. I simply can’t listen to it.”

A long silence followed. The wind rustled in the trees. Everybody grew restless. Each listened to his own inner voice and heard it express the same sinister thoughts. Dr. Arnoldi grieved bitterly and morosely, tall Cornet Krause was bored and indifferent, for no illusions united him to life, Tchish irritably asked himself many questions, but found no answers, and Dchenieff, strangely agitated, gazed at the void in his soul. Behind the walls of the house a sad, pale

woman was dying, and somewhere Nelly was hiding—Nelly whose life was ruined. Only Eugenia Samoilovna looked at Naumoff in perplexity and in her eyes sparkled the primitive life that knows no reflection.

“The suicides’ club,” murmured Tchish.

Eugenia Samoilovna shook herself, as though she had just awakened from a painful dream.

“Why, where’s Arbusoff?” she asked.

Dr. Arnoldi and Krause exchanged glances.

“What is it?” asked Eugenia Samoilovna, noticing their expressions: “A secret?”

Tall Krause was silent, and then said with great self-importance:

“It’s no longer a secret, and need not be since our code of honour has taken the matter up.”

“Is there going to be a duel, then?” asked Eugenia Samoilovna, with timid curiosity.

“Yes,” replied Krause, standing up stiffly.

Eugenia Samoilovna looked into his face with wide-open, eager eyes.

“It may end very seriously,” said Tchish, looking indignant, as though he disliked the duel as much as the duellists.

“Oh, yes,” agreed Cornet Krause meaningly. “Of course. Augustoff is the best shot in the regiment, whereas Arbusoff has hardly ever used a pistol. Yes, he’s bound to kill him. And he’s such a cold-blooded, cruel man.”

Cornet Krause broke off to reflect whether or no Adjutant Augustoff were cold-blooded enough to kill Arbusoff. They all gazed at him expectantly; it was so quiet that they might have been following his thoughts.

“Yes, there’s no doubt about it,” began Cornet Krause again, as if he had taken everything into consideration and had now come to a definite conclusion. “He’ll kill him!”

He said these words with such certainty and solemnity that they all started. For some reason Eugenia Samoilovna looked round at Dchenieff, and soon they all mechanically followed the direction of her eyes.

At this moment some one came up to the table from the side and leant against it gently. Inaudible as the steps had

been, they had all been conscious of them and looked round in dismay.

Nelly stood there, both hands on the edge of the table, and looked severely at Krause, frowning as much as to say : " I heard everything. Is it true ? "

There was a long, strained pause. Dchenieff had jumped up horrified. He did not know that Nelly lived in the house, for she never came out when Eugenia Samoilovna entertained. Genitchka moved abruptly, as though to rush up to Nelly, but the latter just turned her pretty head away and Eugenia Samoilovna abandoned her impetuous intention.

Nelly's delicate lips moved.

" When is the duel ? " she asked quietly.

Krause had not told them that, and they all thought how strange it was that they should have forgotten to ask. The cornet looked down at Nelly coldly and meditatively from his great height, as though pondering the results of his answer. Nelly waited, without moving her burning eyes from his face.

" The day after to-morrow," said the cornet abruptly ; he bowed to Nelly and left the table. He was soon lost to sight in the darkness.

Nelly remained in the same position, her fingers clenched on the edge of the table, gazing in the direction where the cornet had disappeared.

Dchenieff took a step towards her, without knowing himself what to say or do. But Nelly's eyes were so full of hate that he stopped.

The others all began talking at once, careful not to look at Dchenieff in his aimless and ludicrous position.

" As a matter of fact," said Davidenko, " it's not always the better shot who kills in a duel. It's happened often enough that people who knew nothing about firing have shot down the most skilled duellists."

" Certainly," cried Eugenia Samoilovna, succeeding at last in her effort to grasp Nelly's hand.

Nelly did not move or try to release herself. She did nothing, but still leaned against the table.

" Oh, yes," Trenieff agreed with Davidenko, nervously twirling his moustache. " It's one thing to hit the bull's-eye,

but quite another to aim when the pistol is pointed at you. There's an immense difference."

Again they all spoke at once, to convince themselves of what none of them believed. Suddenly Nelly laughed abruptly, left the table and went towards the house.

They all started up and began to take leave at once.

"I should like a few words with you, Serge Nicolaievitch," called Eugenia Samoilovna.

Dchenieff stood still without raising his head. He knew what she wanted to say. The others retreated hastily, oppressed by the disagreeable situation. Eugenia Samoilovna tripped up and down on tip-toe before Dchenieff and looked at him scornfully.

He was silent. He felt broken, mean and insignificant; at that moment he could not have offered any resistance to the coarsest insults or the most impudent obtrusiveness.

"Tell me now," began Eugenia Samoilovna haughtily, as, conscious of her power, she rejoiced in his helplessness. "It almost looks as if you hadn't played the best part in this affair."

Dchenieff trembled, the blood rose to his face, everything swam before his eyes.

"I give nobody the right . . ." he began huskily.

Eugenia Samoilovna laughed insolently.

"I am not asking for it. You can toss your head as high as you like, it doesn't frighten me. . . . I wanted to tell you, and I mean to tell you that——"

Dchenieff moved nearer to her. He was enraged, and if she had said another word he would have struck her pretty, insolent face. But she sprang back, laughed again mockingly, turned quickly round and ran away.

Dchenieff remained where he was, feeling as though he were slowly sinking deeper and deeper into sticky, evil-smelling mud.

Then big, clumsy Dr. Arnoldi took his arm quietly and led him away.

CHAPTER XXIX

TRENIEFF and Lieutenant Totski were standing in the hall taking leave of the adjutant. Trenieff was pale and gloomy, the lieutenant overbearing and emphatic. They had discussed everything, and the adjutant was only waiting for them to go. Trenieff knew it. How he loathed the good-looking officer with his cold, insolent face, hated his arrogant air, his hard eyes, his firm, coarse chin. And yet he could not make up his mind to go.

"Yes, then we'll call for you to-morrow at half-past five punctually," he said, twirling his moustache.

"The great thing is not to be anxious, and mind you have a good night's rest, so that your hand is firm," said Lieutenant Totski impressively. He even looked round at Trenieff to see if he had heard how bravely and confidently he had pronounced these terrible words.

"Yes, proper sleep, that's the great thing," murmured Trenieff absently. The feeling that he could not go infuriated him.

At length, observing the frigid contempt in the adjutant's face, he made an effort, shook hands for the second time and said : "Good-bye."

"Good-bye," answered the adjutant quietly.

Trenieff and Lieutenant Totski turned to the door. The lieutenant seized the handle. The adjutant had remained standing where he was, and his face looked pale in the twilight. It was dark in the room and he was alone. And that all at once cut Trenieff to the heart. He suddenly realised that this man, a good-for-nothing scoundrel, would die the next day. And now, on the last evening of his life he was left all alone in the dark, dreary room. There was not one single creature in the whole town who cared for him.

Something prompted Trenieff to turn back from the threshold, and he went up to the adjutant, and said chokingly : "Good-bye, dear old fellow ! "

He would have liked to clasp him in his arms.

"Good-bye," replied the adjutant, as coldly as before, and Trenieff thought he sneered in the darkness.

The impetuous feeling that had warmed his heart died away at once. It went through him like a knife that he had only made himself ridiculous by his sentimentality. And as he went out he thought with intentional brutality: 'Let the dog die a dog's death.'

As soon as he had got rid of Lieutenant Totzki with his incessant chatter about the duel, he meditated the whole way home upon two things.

"Why was I so firmly convinced that he, the best shot in the regiment, would be killed, and not Arbusoff? And why should the recollection of him alone in that dismal, gloomy room be so painful, though he is such a scoundrel? Perhaps he would have liked me to have been more companionable, to have clasped his hand and chatted a little. Perhaps his insolence is only a mask, designed to hide his true self for ever from his fellow-creatures who must once have rebuffed him very cruelly! Naumoff is right—we're all unhappy. He is unhappy, so is Arbusoff, and so am I. And in our grief we rush at one another like mad dogs. . . ."

Trenieff strode morosely down the street. At the gate of his house he turned round and went straight to the club. Although he knew there would be another scene of jealousy next day, he played and drank all night without closing his eyes and drove off to Lieutenant Totzki's at five o'clock.

When the adjutant was alone again he went back into his study and sat down at the table, leaning his head on his hand.

He was not in the least afraid of the next day. He was quite certain that he could not be killed. His heart beat evenly and calmly. Only in the depths of his soul a heavy burden oppressed him. A sudden thought flashed through his mind: 'When I've killed that dunderhead, I must get the girl somehow.'

He would have liked her to come to him on the very day of the duel, and this wish was prompted by nothing but the most mature reflection which admitted of no contradiction. It was so strong that he clenched his teeth with rage.

Some one entered the room.

"Who's there?" asked the officer quietly, and noticed for the first time that he was in the dark.

His servant was on the threshold.

"There's a young lady to see you, your honour."

Behind him appeared another figure.

The adjutant got up, astonished.

"What can I do for you?" he asked.

"I want to speak to you," a woman's voice answered.

The servant closed the door softly.

The adjutant still stood at the table, and his visitor at the door. He looked, but could not recognise her.

The slender figure moved gently and the adjutant went up and looked into her pale face.

"You!" he cried, in astonishment.

"Yes, it's I," answered Nelly softly.

A malicious look came into the cold, insolent face with the firm chin. He hesitated a moment, then took a step towards her and grasped the hand hanging listlessly at her side.

"You . . ." he repeated, and then paused.

His wish had unexpectedly materialised. He did not stop to reflect why she had come, a wild instinct seized him and at that moment Nelly felt that she would not leave him as she had come. But she was not alarmed. It was all the same to her. One single thought obsessed her mind, in comparison with which all else was trivial.

"I have come," she said, with difficulty. "I have come to ask you . . ."

"What for?" asked the adjutant, seizing her other hand. Nelly made a feeble effort to free herself.

"Later . . ." she said dreamily, in reply to his touch. "Let me speak."

"Well now, speak!" The adjutant did not relax his grasp.

"To-morrow . . . you are fighting Arbusoff?"

"Possibly."

"I know . . . it's on my account . . . it mustn't happen. . . ."

The adjutant still held her hands. "May I ask why not?"

"Because I am the cause."

The adjutant laughed. "A pretty woman can be the cause of a great many things."

Nelly frowned impatiently. She seemed not to have understood his words, perhaps not even to have heard them. Her face showed the strain of concentrated emotion.

"Because it's my fault, but you . . . will kill him," she repeated.

"Very likely," agreed the officer scornfully.

"I won't have it," cried Nelly desperately, till it echoed through the rooms.

"Oho!" drawled the officer.

Her hair had come down and slipped over her cheeks, making her skin look paler than ever. Silver-grey sparks flashed in the officer's eyes, but he still smiled calmly and cynically. Nelly began again laboriously :

"I know—you said low, terrible things about me. Perhaps I deserved it. But he mustn't suffer for it. Don't you understand how awful that would be. It would be a crime, and it mustn't happen."

The adjutant swayed about on tip-toe, seeming to enjoy the joke.

Nelly clenched her fingers impatiently.

"Listen, you're a human being—surely you must understand that if anything happened . . . it would be ghastly."

The adjutant was silent, still on tip-toe. Nelly felt she might as well talk to stone as to this immobility. She grew embarrassed and could find no words. She had been so certain when she came running to him that she had only to say a word to avert the catastrophe. Now she saw that nothing she could say would make any impression on this man. Tears and entreaties were her last resource.

"It is not so dreadful as you think," said the adjutant slowly, in a rather high voice.

Suddenly she realised that he was making fun of her, and she felt his appraising glances from head to foot. She knew what he was thinking and that she was in danger. But the thought that the duel would take place if she went away restrained her. Cornet Krause's words, 'He's the best shot in the regiment,' stood before her eyes, as though written in white on a black wall. Hardly knowing what she

was doing she fell on her knees before him, driven to the last extremity.

"I beg you," she murmured, half unconsciously, grasping his hand with her burning fingers.

The officer smiled.

"You beg? That's another matter. But one must pay for favours."

Nelly seemed not to understand.

"What . . . how? . . ."

The adjutant smiled.

"You are a pretty girl. . . ."

Nelly got up slowly. Her face had grown white.

"That's vile," she said, in a suffocating voice. She groped for the door-handle, which she did not seem able to find.

"Possibly."

Nelly was silent for a moment, never taking her eyes off his cold face.

The adjutant waited, smiling with assurance.

"You are a blackguard," said Nelly softly, and went towards the door.

His firm chin trembled almost imperceptibly and he winced involuntarily. But he gave no answer. He leant back against the table, his hands in the pockets of his riding-breeches, looking at her.

Nelly grew weaker under the glance of his grey eyes; her movements were unsteady, her feet gave way.

She seized the handle, but did not open the door; it seemed to her as heavy as iron. She looked round. The cold, cruel eyes regarded her. From time to time the officer tapped the floor impatiently with his foot.

Nelly, as in a dream, again took a few steps towards him, then swayed and fell on her knees, as though her last defence had failed.

"For God's sake," her dry lips whispered.

The adjutant shook his head coldly.

Nelly stood up slowly. Her hair fell round her shoulders, she was trembling in every limb.

Then she went to the door again.

The adjutant raised his hands and looked intently at his finger-nails.

Nelly uttered a hoarse, indistinct sound.

"What?" he asked.

Nelly went close up to him, her face grey, and looked at him with fiery hatred in her eyes.

"Very well," she said at last.

Two powerful arms were round her in a moment. With a last flicker of shame she tried to tear herself away, but his arms grasped her more firmly and she was obliged to submit.

She shut her eyes and clenched her teeth.

Suddenly she opened her eyes, realising that she was free again. Stunned and broken she looked up and saw the adjutant standing beside her, a strange expression of perplexity on his face.

"I . . . I didn't know," he said hoarsely.

Nelly covered her face with her hands and leant forward till her hair fell over her knees. She began to cry—burning, helpless tears like those of an unhappy child unjustly beaten. The whole bitterness of her experience, her loneliness and weakness, the way she had been treated, the uncertainty of her terrible future were expressed in this despairing, almost inaudible weeping.

The adjutant bent over her in dismay, his mouth trembling. Then he rushed to the table, seized the water-jug, poured some water into a glass and gave it to her.

"There, don't cry . . . drink, drink," he murmured. There was a new sound in his voice, it was full of pity and anxiety for her and shame for himself.

Suddenly Nelly raised her head, looked trustfully into his face, and smiled innocently and shyly, as though apologising to her best friend for her weakness.

The adjutant turned away. Her burning fingers seized his hand. He tore it away, stepped back and, turning his back on her, he said :

"I promise you . . . I won't shoot. . . . Forgive me for . . ."

Nelly listened with wide-open eyes, scarcely daring to believe him, and a bright, immense joy grew and spread in her martyred heart.

"Go now," repeated the officer hoarsely. "I promise." Nelly rose.

" You . . . " she began joyously, and stretched out both hands.

" Go . . . for God's sake go," repeated the adjutant. He sat down at the table, supporting his head on his hand.

There was a long silence. Nelly stood and looked at him. Her flushed, tear-stained face quivered. She drew softly nearer and touched his shoulder with her finger-tips.

The adjutant did not turn round.

For some time Nelly stood beside him, then she stooped down and kissed his hair tenderly. She thought for a moment, turned slowly round and went away. On the threshold she paused again, then opened the door noiselessly.

The adjutant heard it close behind her, but he did not move.

His orderly came into the room to fetch something, and went away again. He still sat in the same position ; his soul sang and trembled, full of new wonder.

At night, when everything slept, he began to write a letter to his sister in Moscow, but did not finish it, and he threw himself fully dressed on the divan, his face buried in the cushions.

CHAPTER XXX

THE sun had not yet risen, but behind the wood the sky began to turn golden. The mists were melting in the fields, a cross gleamed on one of the churches in the town and the clear fresh chiming of bells rang through the morning air. The birches stood quiet and gentle, like brides awaiting the joyful bridegrooms. A solitary black oak preserved its calm majesty, its mighty green head towering above the whole wood.

There was a small group of people moving about in the level green forest-glade.

Arbusoff walked up and down on the grass, digging the heels of his patent-leather boots into the ground at every step. His stride was long and equal, his face a little paler than usual. And his gloomy bloodshot eyes were weary from lack of sleep.

Every time he came to the edge of the wood, beyond which rolled the broad expanse of distant meadows and the remote sky, he stood still and looked straight in front of him, enraged. But he did not look at the fields, already tinged with the rose-coloured morning light, nor at the brightening sky, but gazed at the ground. An unendurable pressure seemed to weigh down his heavy head and to prevent him from raising it to this glad beautiful world.

The tall cornet was walking about in exactly the same way as Arbusoff, only on the opposite side of the glade, lifting his feet high like a crane. Though his slanting brows were contracted in deep thought, his face had lost nothing of its dignity and importance.

The other second, a young officer, sat smoking on a tree-trunk. As soon as he had finished his cigarette he flung it aside with a circular movement, trying to hit the trunk of a birch, and then immediately selected another from his case ; he was distressed about something. Not on Arbusoff's account, whom he hardly knew, nor on the adjutant's, whom he disliked ; but something else, perhaps just human existence altogether, fragile as glass.

At first during the drive the young officer had tried to give encouragement, which he supposed was appropriate to the occasion, but they hardly answered him. Now they were all silent, each wrapped in his own thoughts, while every minute seemed wearily protracted.

The young officer was almost glad to see the figures of the other party approaching between the trees, though at the same time a chill crept round his heart. He got up at once and went to meet them with an expression of anxiety, trying not to show how his knees trembled.

The fat Lieutenant TotSKI, with his fair moustache and red bloated face, greeted him significantly and fiercely. Actually he was displeased at not being able to manage the whole affair by himself. He was obviously choking with the consciousness of his own importance and anxious to do his best to manage the duel on the most orthodox lines. Trenieff nodded in a surly way and stepped aside at once, biting the ends of his moustache from time to time with an expression which clearly said : "To hell with all of you ; do as you please."

The young officer looked curiously at the adjutant. He was wearing an almost startlingly white linen shirt, and his grey coat was unbuttoned. His cold, insolent face was clean-shaven and fresh, as though he had just plunged his head into cold water. His grey metallic eyes were transparent and keen. Their expression struck the officer, for it was quite different from usual. They were lit up by an inward fire.

"Either he's going to be killed—no, he probably knows that he will do the killing himself," thought the young officer.

The sun rose slowly and majestically over the rim of the horizon. Pink and red patches began to warm the white trunks of the birches. The air grew clearer and softer and a timorous youthful joy seemed to radiate from the coppice. They were all embarrassed to begin with, not knowing who should take the lead with the formalities. As usual the most foolish and shallow was the first to regain possession of himself. Lieutenant TotSKI blushed, puffed himself out, and said in an important voice : "Now then—I think it's time."

Tall Krause stepped forward silently, went to the middle of the clearing and began to pace the distance with long, crane-like strides, his side turned to the rising sun. They all looked at him intently. On the spot where he began his springy sword was stuck in the ground, swaying slightly in the grass. It looked strange to see the point as it were sharply and greedily absorbing the earth. When Krause had reached the end, he looked round. Nobody knew what he wanted till his slanting eyebrows contracted hesitatingly and he called out : "Perhaps some one will give me . . ."

Before he had finished speaking, Lieutenant Totski quickly drew his own sword with a swishing sound and gave it to him. Cornet Krause first examined it carefully, then pushed away the grass with his boots and stuck the point into the ground. The second sword, too, began to sway, twenty paces away from the other. Suddenly it seemed to them all that twenty paces was a terribly short distance.

"Too stupid, too stupid," murmured Trenieff to himself, and turned away.

Lieutenant Totski hurried about busily, drops of perspiration on his forehead.

"Take your places, please," he shouted in a tone of command, as though annoyed that they had not done so of their own accord, instead of leaving everything to him.

Arbusoff turned round sharply and went up to the young officer. The adjutant, too, took his pistol before going to his place. Arbusoff looked across balefully, saw those clear speaking eyes, snatched the pistol with a jerk from the young officer's hands, and then strode heavily to his own place without raising his head.

Nobody had asked Lieutenant Totski to preside over the ceremonies, but he hurried to and fro so conscientiously and took such precautions that everything should go off well that they left him to do as he liked. After he had arranged their positions he stepped into the middle and declared pompously :

"I think it is our duty as seconds to do all . . ."

The adjutant looked at him sharply with smiling eyes. Arbusoff nodded his head sulkily. There was so much resolution in this gesture that Lieutenant Totski felt as if

he had shouted, "Oh! go to hell. . . . We know all about it!"

However, without forgetting the slight movement of the hands which he had heard was correct on such occasions, the lieutenant sprang back a few steps and then raised his outstretched arm.

From the spot where the military surgeon and the other witnesses were standing they could see Totski's red, puffy face and the two motionless figures with unusually long pistols in their hands. The sun must have broken through the morning mist, for the birds twittered more loudly and it grew suddenly very light, so that even at a distance they could distinguish the strangely clear expression in the adjutant's eyes and the deep furrows on Arbusoff's lowering brow.

"One . . ." shouted the lieutenant abruptly. Arbusoff quickly raised his head. Before him, it seemed very close, he saw two fixed eyes which, between the cries, "one, two, three," looked at him joyfully, even kindly. They seemed to speak, to greet him with their two bright rays; but Arbusoff did not understand and frowned more than ever.

"Three," cried the lieutenant, involuntarily recoiling a step.

The adjutant fired.

There was a sharp report and the shot exploded against the trunk of a birch tree. The rooks cawed in agitation and circled above the oak's topmost green boughs.

In that one second, hardly delaying his shot, a thousand thoughts flashed through Arbusoff's brain.

"He aimed badly on purpose. Mockery, I suppose. In that case I must shoot wide also."

All the furious hatred which he had nursed for so many days, though not specially against this man, the whole strength of his jealousy, his love, and his bitterness poured forth at this moment in an outburst of mad rage.

The adjutant slowly lowered his pistol, without taking his clear fixed eyes off Arbusoff's face.

"Ah . . . that is mockery," Arbusoff still had time to think. "You . . . the best shot . . . take that, then!"

And, aiming carefully at the white shirt-front, he fired.

The report of the shot prevented him from hearing the

horried exclamations from under the trees at the side, where the seconds were standing, and he did not see what happened to his adversary. He only noticed that they all rushed toward Augustoff with horrified faces.

"I've hit him," flashed like lightning through his brain.

The adjutant took a few steps towards him, smiling strangely, his face haggard; then he collapsed suddenly and fell down heavily on the wet green grass. Arbusoff saw only the backs of the seconds surrounding Augustoff. He thrust the long pistol into his pocket, took it out again at once, threw it on the grass, and went, as he thought, towards the horses, but in reality in the opposite direction.

Some one overtook him and touched him on the shoulder.

"Go to him. He is asking for you," said Trenieff very gravely. His face was pale and twitched constantly. "Go . . . You've killed him."

"A dog's death for the dog," replied Arbusoff grimly.

Trenieff recalled his own words and hung his head.

"But don't say that now—do go."

Arbusoff looked irresolutely at his pleading eyes, shrugged his shoulders, turned round abruptly, and went back.

The adjutant was sitting on the ground, both legs stretched out. The lean surgeon in a loose military coat, his cap on the back of his head, squatted on his heels in front of the wounded man. Arbusoff saw a blood-stained shirt protruding under the doctor's hands.

"In the stomach," he thought mechanically. A convulsive tremor ran down his back, and he felt a pleasantly painful sensation behind his knees.

The adjutant's face was pale, tinged with bluish shadows, and his broad teeth gleamed in a strange agony under his moustache.

His clear eyes were fixed on Arbusoff's face as he approached. Lieutenant Totzki and Cornet Krause held him under the arms, so that they were stretched out on either side like those of a malefactor on the cross.

When the adjutant saw Arbusoff he smiled.

"Dying . . ." he said hoarsely; ". . . your hand. Its all the same now."

Arbusoff stood as if rooted to the ground.

"He wants you, to . . . shake hands with him," he heard a whisper at his side.

He looked round in surprise and saw the young boyish face of an unknown officer beside him, with tears in his eyes.

The adjutant bent towards him, his eyes growing lighter.

"Do you know that . . . your Nelly . . ." he gasped, still smiling, "was with me yesterday . . . evening—"

All the blood rushed to Arbusoff's head. He had a furious longing to hurl himself upon him and make an end—a series of fevered images shot through his brain.

"I promised her not to shoot you," murmured the adjutant quite softly, and his face was transfigured by a rapture that seemed to radiate from within. "I was sorry for her . . . she is so unhappy," he ended. His face turned grey, and he began to throw himself about, shrieking.

Arbusoff, surrounded by a dense red mist, felt himself led away. Cornet Krause's cold voice said something to him, but he could not understand, hearing through everything a wild terrible cry :

"It hurts . . . it hurts . . . oh . . ."

The bright light of the sun at the edge of the wood made his eyes smart.

CHAPTER XXXI

THE evening glow seemed to have fallen close to the earth, and between the black shadows of the houses and the dark groups of trees, merged in a single mass, the stars shone out like fire. The evening wind blew fitfully as before a storm, and there was a muffled rustling in the garden.

The summer was passing, and there were no longer soft tones in the soughing breeze. The leaves rustled stiffly and oppressively, scattering chill and desolation.

Nelly went on to the balcony with a lamp, put it on the table and sat down wearily, resting her head on her hands. A book lay in front of her, but her eyes were fixed on the darkness of the garden, as though they found there something she must deeply consider.

The bright light of the lamp made the surrounding objects dark and strange. Only by turning away from the light could one see that the sky was lighter than the earth, and that the wind was quickly chasing the clouds along like columns of smoke.

From time to time it swooped down on the lamp, which flamed up at once in alarm, covering Nelly with blacks. Then it burnt clear and even again. Nelly looked unflinchingly into the darkness, her hands pressed to her temples. Her thoughts, disconnected as the clouds in the sky, raced with the same speed through her motionless head.

Eugenia Samoilovna was not at home. Nelly knew where she was. Although she imagined more than really occurred, this no longer excited her to jealousy. She was indifferent to everything. After the death of the adjutant, that strange person with his cold, insolent face, of whom she had retained a bright, sacred memory, Nelly heard of Arbusoff's disappearance, heard rumours of his drunkenness, and of his mode of life, which clearly showed that he meant to ruin himself. And there was an abyss in Nelly's soul. She became still more reserved, hid herself and, as it were, became dead to her surroundings, no longer torn with sorrow

and anxiety for the future, but feeling utter despair within herself and complete isolation from the outer world. She waited for some conclusion with cold composure and left it to life to work its will on her, to do the very worst it could.

Some one came slowly and sadly up the steps. Nelly raised her head, but the lamp-light dazzled her and she could not see who it was.

"It is I," called Dr. Arnoldi from the darkness, and he came on to the balcony.

Nelly silently extended her pale, delicate hand. The tall, heavy doctor closely watched her tired face, the frown between her austere steady eyes, but he said nothing.

Nelly, too, was silent. There was no sound but the muffled roar of the wind, and it seemed as though the clouds rushed forward noisily in the skies. Dr. Arnoldi sat down at the table, put his stick in front of him and crossed his big arms on it.

"Doctor," said Nelly suddenly.

Dr. Arnoldi lifted his head.

"What?"

"Tell me. When life becomes so complicated that one can no longer disentangle the threads, what is to be done?" Nelly's voice sounded strangely dead, quite mechanical, as though it were not a question, but a fragment of her thought, speaking of its own accord, without expecting an answer.

"I don't know," replied Dr. Arnoldi, and his head sank again.

Nelly pressed her fingers more firmly to her temples and looked into the darkness again. The doctor was silent. The wind rustled, there was a feeling of restlessness in the air, the very darkness seemed alive with movement. The torn clouds rushed across the sky in panic-stricken terror, the tree-tops flung themselves hither and thither, the wind flew along, finding no resting-place.

A faint sound came from the room, its meaning indistinguishable amid the noise. The doctor and Nelly raised their heads to listen.

The cry was repeated. "Nelly." They understood.

"Maria Pavlovna is calling you," said Dr. Arnoldi, and his voice shook.

Nelly got up quickly to go to the door, but suddenly stood still and asked impetuously :

“ Is she dying ? ”

The doctor’s face was convulsed. For a minute he was unable to answer, then his lips moved, but he could not utter a syllable, and only nodded his head.

Nelly looked long at him in silence.

“ Oh, this accursed life ! ” she said unexpectedly, and went away quickly, leaving the despairing cry in the doctor’s ears.

The sick woman was lying on the bed, and she stretched her feeble hands towards Nelly.

“ Nellitchka. . . . Something frightens me. . . . The wind is raging so. . . . Will you sit with me a little ? . . . Whom were you talking to ? ”

“ The doctor’s there,” said Nelly calmly, as if it had been some one else who had just anathematized life.

The invalid opened her eyes wide. A faint joy lit up her face, making it look so sweet and trustful that Nelly turned away, oppressed.

“ Would you like me to call him ? ” she asked dully.

“ Of course, call him. Doctor ! ” cried the sick woman.

Heavy steps were heard. Nelly stood in the middle of the room, looking now at the door, now at the invalid. Maria Pavlovna smiled quietly, her eyes riveted on the door. When the doctor’s steps approached she suddenly raised her hands to arrange her hair. Nelly watched her. Dr. Arnoldi came in.

“ Good evening, my dear friend. I’ve been very dull without you.” She laughed. “ Fancy, people really manage to be dull, even when they’ve only three days to live. Sit down, and stay with me a little while.”

Dr. Arnoldi put down his stick and pulled a chair to the bedside.

The sick woman looked at him happily, and when he turned away for a moment to put his hat down, she raised her hands again to tidy her hair. Nelly went quietly out on to the balcony.

There she sunk once more into thought, her hands pressed against her temples, her eyes fixed again on the loud darkness of the garden.

She pondered over and over again the fact that Maria Pavlovna loved Dr. Arnoldi and must soon die. In what despair would she die, how she must battle for her life, clinging to it with powerless efforts. No one will ever realize this agony. She will disappear in the grave, as if she had never been, but the old clumsy doctor will be left behind on earth with a shattered heart and a barren soul. How bright and fabulously beautiful that happiness will seem which passed him by so closely and now was gone for ever, as though some one were making merry over his dreary, miserable life. But if she had not died, there would have been many days of dull, ordinary life: they would have quarrelled after six months, passion would have faded, they might even have been a burden to one another in the end. . . . She might have left him. There is no happiness, only an illusion of happiness.

In Maria Pavlovna's room the lamp was covered by a thick shade. The light fell on the snow-white bedclothes, beneath which her thin figure was softly outlined, and her pale hands, leaving her white face, her hair and her large eyes in shadow. In this green-shaded opaque light it was impossible to see how sunken her cheeks were and that there were blue shadows under her eyes. She looked young and pretty as a girl in love; she beamed at the doctor.

"I'm much better, Doctor! Do you know, I sometimes think I might get well . . . strange, because I sometimes used to feel better, and yet I was always sure I should soon die. But now . . . and all the time I'm as weak as a child, I couldn't get out of bed without Nelly and Genitchka—now I always feel I shall recover. I am ashamed to confess it, Doctor." She smiled shyly and tears glittered in her eyes. "I had a dream, and since then I've had some hope again."

The doctor opened his clever little eyes wide and gazed at her. He had known for a long time that there was no hope for her, and had accustomed himself to the thought, but now his heart contracted with such force that he could have cried out. He heard the joyful whisper of one who longs to believe in a miracle, and understood that Death was approaching in the brilliant radiance of the eyes and the happy smile.

"The end," he thought. The green shadow of the lamp-shade fell on his haggard, flaccid face, where there was no indication of the terrible struggles of sorrow and love which had transformed a human countenance into a mask. With incredible strength of will he restrained his voice and asked quietly : "What was the dream ?"

The sick woman smiled again quietly and timidly.

"I dreamt that at night, so that Genitchka and you shouldn't see—why you, I wonder ?" she laughed between her tears, "I ran away from home. It was fearfully dark, quite solitary and dreary and stifling, and I was so afraid somebody might find out. But then—well, you know how it is in dreams—I suddenly felt quite happy, and it was bright all round me. And then it was no longer night, but clear morning. The sky was quite light, and all round was a meadow full of flowers ! Red, yellow, light blue. . . . Quite simple wild flowers, you know. . . . I went along, thinking. . . . Well, now, I don't know. . . ." The sick woman became confused, blushed and dropped her eyes, after casting a hurried glance at the doctor. ". . . I was thinking of something nice and then I went on to think : 'My God, after all I'm not ill. . . .' I had never felt so well and light-hearted . . . and really I was as light as a cloud of mist. I looked down at my dress, and saw that I was quite transparent, and I could see the flowers through myself. . . . Then I had a very strange feeling. . . . An ecstasy seized me till I thought my heart would burst. . . . I wept for joy, grasped a handful of flowers, pressed them to my bosom and melted away entirely. The same field, the same flowers, the morning light, the rising sun, but I am no more. . . . I am there, I see everything, feel everything, and am yet not myself."

"How ?" asked Dr. Arnoldi again.

"Well, how. . . . I don't know. . . . Simply not. . . . And such joy, such joy. And then some one said to me : 'Look, now you are well again. See how beautiful and how simple that is.' And with that I woke up and felt so well that I began to weep for joy. I woke Genitchka, quite frightening her. And since then I've had hope. Isn't that ridiculous, Doctor ?"

What is there ridiculous about it ?" Dr. Arnoldi

clenched his teeth and rested his chin on his hands, which he had crossed on the arm of the chair. "It's all possible. You really are better. The summer is wonderfully dry, the air magnificent . . . the quiet life. . . ."

The sick woman drank in every word with enthusiasm.

"And how lovely it would be, Doctor, if I recover." She clapped her transparent hands in joyful longing. "I have been through so much all this time. Now I am no longer the silly spoilt woman, who rushed into everything and embittered her own life and everybody else's. Now I know everything, Doctor. Oh, I have grown wise—wise!"

She laughed. Dr. Arnoldi listened sadly.

"And don't you want to go back to the stage?" he asked. His voice was transformed: it was no longer the sullen Dr. Arnoldi speaking, the broken-down old man, but a light-hearted child, in happy play.

The invalid made a gesture of delighted refusal.

"Not for the world! I know now what to do. Dear Doctor, you are so good, so kind . . . do you know that? Do you know it?"

She grasped his large hand in both her own and clasped it to her breast, delicate as a schoolgirl's under the white gown. The doctor started at the touch. He felt for the first time that she was a woman, and in spite of everything still beautiful. The thought was so little in harmony with the certainty of her coming death that he nearly wrenched his hand away. Shame, joy, unknown or long-forgotten feelings besieged him.

She looked straight into his eyes with a bright open glance, which held neither embarrassment nor fear: it spoke clearly and purely of her love for him.

It was so wonderful and so terrible that Dr. Arnoldi stooped and pressed his face on her feeble hands.

"Doctor!" she cried softly and happily. "What is the matter with you? Have I grieved you? Or do you——?"

Dr. Arnoldi felt that she was going to utter this last word and openly mention the happiness which he had never known in his life. That could never be realized now, near though it seemed. He could not have borne to hear that word.

"I am so . . . let me alone," he interrupted her gloomily.

"I am so tired to-day . . . too nervous . . . a difficult operation . . . and I am so glad you're better. . . . I'm getting old and feeble," he added lightly, and got up.

She continued to hold his hand and drew him towards her. Her eyes looked up at him, her cheeks flamed, her lips were parted for a kiss, and the weak movement of her limbs in the unrealizable desire for caresses was visible under the thin quilt.

"Well, now, good-bye! . . . and mind you get well soon."

Dr. Arnoldi hurriedly kissed her hand and went out of the room, hastening his steps as he remembered her happy look of love and surrender.

He met Eugenia Samoilovna on the stairs. The freshness of night and wind streamed from her, doubly welcome to him after the close room; and she smiled at him with the same freshness.

"Ah, it's you. Where are you off to now? How is my Masha?" she asked clearly and gaily.

The doctor stood still, grasped her firmly by both hands, thrust her against the wall, as if he meant to bring her lively happiness to an end. "She is dying," he almost shouted.

Eugenia Samoilovna started back in horror and opened her mouth, unable to utter a sound. Her beautiful clear-cut face grew as white as the wall.

"What's that you are saying, Doctor?"

"She's dying; it's the end . . ." repeated the doctor wildly. "And . . ."

He did not finish speaking, but flung her hands aside, knocked heavily against the banisters and vanished in the windy darkness.

Eugenia Samoilovna looked after him in dismay. Then she picked up her skirts and rushed to her sick friend, expecting to find her already dead and lying in the room a corpse.

Maria Pavlovna welcomed her with a cry of joy.

CHAPTER XXXII

THESE were the last moonlit summer nights, already sharp with the chill of approaching autumn.

The moon hung large and white behind the black trees and cast long rays of mysterious light among the dark branches. Light and darkness were interlaced in magic play, and as Dchenieff went along the broad avenue with Eugenia Samoilovna her face was lost in the dark shadows one moment, so that only the sound of her voice betrayed her laughter ; the next it was flooded with a cold blue light, and her black eyes shone enigmatically from her white face, which seemed like that of a wild nymph. Dchenieff felt the attraction and provocation of these unfathomable expressions ; sometimes he almost hated her.

He slashed his whip nervously against his foot. For the first time in his life he felt powerless. This woman was tormenting him like a boy, now making a laughing pretence of surrender, then equally unexpectedly repulsing him and afterwards clinging to him with her slender body as though nothing had happened. There were moments when he thought he had attained his object, but at the last instant she escaped his eager grasp with her rallying laugh and her usual warning.

Dchenieff was often overcome by such fury that he decided to insult her and go away.

" I daresay this is very amusing for you," he said in a sneering tone, which trembled with malice and desire, " but I don't care for such tricks. This kind of thing doesn't suit me ; I'm past the age, I suppose. I am not accustomed . . . "

" One must accustom oneself to everything, Serge Nicolaievitch," replied Eugenia Samoilovna amiably from the darkness.

He glanced quickly at her, but the dense black shadows hid her face, and he could only guess that she was smiling.

" I don't see the smallest necessity for doing so ! " he answered through his teeth, and paled at his own absurdity.

"Then you wouldn't be so conceited."

"It doesn't suit me." He forced himself to use the same jesting tone.

"Why?" cried Genitchka in astonishment, suddenly stepping out into the full light of the moon, tall and slight with her rounded breast and slender waist. The moon clearly outlined every curve from her head to her feet as she stepped lightly over the smooth sand whose grains glittered in silver sparks. "But I should like it very much! What is to be done? You are used to having everything your own way, now try for once to please me. And that pleases you too! Does it go very much against the grain? Poor dear, I pity you!"

Dchenieff cast a quick glance at her face and saw that her lips were tremulous with smiles.

"And do you know," she suddenly began, gravely and almost solemnly, as though she had made up her mind not to joke any more, "sometimes you are frightfully funny. Don't you notice it yourself?"

Dchenieff ground his teeth with rage at the undisguised mockery.

"You seem to think you can make fun of me." He restrained himself and kept calm.

"I?" cried Eugenia Samoilovna in surprise, dipping into shadow again. "Should I dare to make fun of Don Juan, the conqueror of hearts. . . . I, a weak woman, ready to sink into his arms. Are you really so modest? I had a better opinion of you, Serge Nicolaievitch!"

There was an imperceptible element of something else mingled with the banter, which was not expressed in words. She did not know herself what she felt. Sometimes when Dchenieff became importunate her head began to swim. But against her will her voice retained its old sharpness and cunning and spoke the same teasing, insulting words. Then again she was seized so forcibly by curiosity and desire that she grew weak and longed with every nerve that he might take advantage of her weakness. She felt that she would offer no resistance. But no sooner did Dchenieff touch her than the strange, crafty, proud feeling reawakened and she repulsed him again.

The white moon looked coldly down on the dark garden.

Far away in the town there were people and the whole current of life. But here were only these two, full of youth and desire, playing a dangerous game of mutual torment and evasion. Intensely conscious of her proximity, he suppressed the impulse to seize her forcibly, and did his best to conceal it by continuing to talk. And she battled obstinately with him and with herself, her black hair tousled, her eyes dim with longing, her mind tense as a violin-string, defending her beautiful body, wanting at once everything and nothing, and fascinating him by her scornful laughter.

They had come to the end of the garden and stopped. The trees were sparser and smaller here. Motionless shrubs stood white in the moonlight, and equally motionless lay the shadows at their feet. Above them spread the open sky, flooded in white moonlight which illuminated everything sharply and hardly—the distant spire of a belfry with its glittering cross, the silvered fences and hedges, the dark trees, the starry sky, and their two figures standing out clearly from the lighter background.

"It's time now, Masha's waiting!" said Eugenia Samoilovna, but she did not move.

Dchenieff saw her fresh laughing lips, and at that moment the habitual sensation of his power over women deserted him.

"Well, as you like. Good-bye," he said huskily. "Possibly I amuse you very much, but it's too much for me. You will have to find somebody else. I am not one of those who are only there to beguile the time for bored actresses."

Eugenia Samoilovna regarded him intently, as though his anger greatly entertained her.

"Good-bye!" repeated Dchenieff, and he turned away.

"Where are you going? Take me home! That would be nice!" she said softly.

"You are in your garden," replied Dchenieff, "you'll be able to find your way alone."

He wanted to offend her, to rid himself of the raging bitterness with which his whole body tingled.

Eugenia Samoilovna was silent. He raised his hat and left her.

She stood on the grass, as though frozen by the cold

moonlight, and did not say a word. She made no movement to hold him back. Already he had stepped into the shadow of the trees.

"Stop!" she cried suddenly, with a strange note of command. Dchenieff stood still. "Come here!"

Dchenieff did not obey.

"Don't you hear? Come here! I wish it! . . . Do you hear? . . ." She did not know herself why she called him back, but everything swam before her eyes; she felt overcome, and it seemed as though the moon had come quite close to the clearing and was shining down on her with its white magic light.

She hardly noticed how Dchenieff stepped to her side, and how his arm went round her waist to draw her to him. Their eyes met piercingly, suspiciously watching every movement, as though they were enemies struggling for life or death. She did not yield. Leaning back and very pale, she pressed her hands against his breast.

"Well?" gasped Dchenieff hoarsely, holding her down firmly. She wriggled up again like a cat and stood silent, her hands still extended.

"I want you . . . I want you!" murmured Dchenieff, hardly knowing what he said. "Now."

"But I don't wish it," she cried with returning liveliness. "Let me go! How dare you!"

He hardly heard her words, and only felt that she was in his arms. He threw her roughly on to the grass, groaning with fury, but in a moment she had slipped away from him.

"Hallo!" she called triumphantly, already several paces away, free and scornful again. He was left kissing the air, his arms hanging down loosely.

Dchenieff's eyes darkened. Beside himself with rage, he swung the whip, glancing at her round bare shoulders. She saw his intention at once, and raised her hand to defend herself with a cry of alarm. He saw that she was expecting the blow, and he felt compelled to strike; he swung the whip round again and a stinging lash fell on her shoulders. Flames danced before her eyes.

"Oh!" she cried plaintively, as she swayed and tried to grasp the whip. "It hurts . . . don't!"

At the same moment he flung down the whip, seized her

trembling figure and threw her on to the grass. She yielded to his mastery, weak and obedient as a slave, all her resistance broken.

She cried out again under his burning embraces, and while everything swum around her, she flung her arms round him and pressed him to her.

"I will . . . I will . . ." she said through clenched teeth, and then she slowly sank into a languorous quiescence. The moon stood white and round above the clearing and shone down on her graceful form, upon her pale face with closed eyes and clenched teeth.

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was already late when Eugenia Samoilovna awoke next morning. She lay in bed a long time, revelling in her laziness. The crumpled quilt had slipped to the ground, and her small narrow feet had a brownish tinge against the white sheet. She had thrown back her arms and thrust her hands into her hair. A pleasant sensation of fatigue stole over her. She wanted to do nothing but lie motionless on the bed with closed eyes.

She was not thinking of what had happened the night before ; she was neither alarmed nor distressed ; she allowed nothing to disturb her delightful memories.

Curiously enough she never thought of Dchenieff, as though he had had nothing to do with it and the gratification had been entirely her own. Eugenia Samoilovna did not long for him to come again, did not want to think that there might be a repetition of their intercourse, or that since yesterday she had given him certain rights over her. She wanted nothing but to lie there, enjoying her pleasant mood to the full, and to stretch her fine youthful limbs on the soft bed.

At last she got up, washed in cold water which restored her usual vigour at once, and put on her favourite dress ; she was entirely her cheerful self again.

She sauntered light-heartedly through the rooms. In the dining-room she encountered Nelly, who looked anxious and worried.

“ Go to Maria Pavlovna, she doesn’t feel well.”

“ Really ? ” Nelly’s penetrating glance suddenly caused Eugenia Samoilovna a feeling of embarrassment. She was ashamed of herself for having forgotten the invalid.

Maria Pavlovna was sitting up in bed. There was no apparent alteration, except in the terribly strained intensity of her dark shining eyes, which she fixed expectantly on Eugenia Samoilovna.

“ How are you ? ” asked Eugenia Samoilovna, horrified.

Maria Pavlovna smiled faintly.

"Do you feel worse? Have you any pain?" Genitchka was at a loss.

Maria Pavlovna's lips moved silently.

"What?" asked Eugenia Samoilovna again, not understanding her.

"Look, what is that?"

Eugenia Samoilovna followed her glance, which rested on her bare feet. They were not white as usual, but of a waxen pallor. There was a look of disease about the skin, and all the curves had become shapeless and blurred,

"What is it?" Eugenia Samoilovna looked uncomprehendingly at the dreadful feet.

"I don't know!" murmured the sick woman, convulsively stroking the smooth skin which was swollen like a blister. "There . . . it seems to be dropsy . . . it's the end."

"Nonsense!" cried Genitchka. Cold shudders ran down her back; she realized in that moment that it was indeed the end.

"No . . . it's all over. . . . I'm dying. . . ." Maria Pavlovna fell back and wept.

"Shall I send for the doctor?" asked Genitchka excitedly. "Yes? . . . send for him? . . . I will at once."

"I have sent for the doctor," replied Nelly, who had come into the room. "Dr. Arnoldi isn't in the town, he won't be back till the evening. . . . I have sent for another one."

She went to the bedside, looked intently at Maria Pavlovna and began gently to stroke her hair. The sick woman started, clasped her hand tightly in both her own and sobbed:

"Nellitchka! . . . Nellitchka! . . . Don't let me die . . . I want to live. I'm afraid, so afraid. . . . Nellitchka!"

"What are you thinking about?" cried Genitchka in terror. "What an idea . . . dear Masha . . . don't cry!"

"Genitchka! . . . What is it. . . . I won't die . . . do save me! . . . help me. . . . I'm still young, I want to live."

She wept more and more loudly and bitterly, grasped Nelly's and Genitchka's hands, hugged and kissed them

both. She was seized by an appalling dread of death. No longer understanding that it was all in vain, she clung to everything, implored everybody, expecting some sudden rescue, and then buried her face again in the pillows wet with tears, as though to hide from death whose approach was so speedy and inevitable.

"If she goes on crying like this, she'll die before our eyes," whispered Nelly softly to Eugenia Samoilovna. "If only the doctor would come soon. . . . It's ages since I sent for him."

This nightmare lasted for an hour. Nelly and Genitchka were occupied with the dying woman. Her weeping had changed to a frightful laughter which lacerated the soul. She looked at their faces with glittering, wide-open eyes, as though to learn something from their terrified expressions. She laughed more and more loudly, as though it amused her to think that death should be so unimaginably ghastly. Genitchka could not endure this laughter, she pressed her hands against her ears and ran into the next room. There she leant against the wall and shut her eyes.

Suddenly the laughter changed into uninterrupted screaming, which reached its climax in a shrill cry and stopped as unexpectedly as it had begun.

The dying woman lay quite still, the palms of her hands against her cheeks, and looked straight in front of her, seeing nothing. She seemed to have realized that it was all over and that no one could help her. She crouched under the quilt, as though she wished to be on the alert when the last moment came.

Then an even, unhurried step was heard, and a fat round little man appeared in the doorway.

"Doctor!" cried Genitchka in a frenzy of despair.
"Masha, here's the doctor!"

The invalid raised herself slightly and fixed a glance of strained frantic hope on the doctor.

"Well now, what is it?" asked the doctor drily, in a business-like tone, as one to whom every minute is precious. He shook the sick woman's feeble hand, which fell again at once. Then he whisked up his frock-coat, sat down on the chair which Genitchka had hastily placed for him and slowly looked round the room with his cold grey eyes

gleaming under his glasses. Nelly had gone to the window, Genitchka stood trembling at the foot of the bed.

"Can I wash my hands?" The doctor turned abruptly to Genitchka.

He was a long time washing his hairy hands with their short fingers. Then he dried them with great deliberation, looking so indifferently, now at his nails, now at the wall of the room, that Genitchka was angry.

"There's something wrong with her feet, Doctor," she said, to hurry him.

"Who attends the lady?" asked the doctor without looking at her, instead of answering.

"Dr. Arnoldi."

"Oh," said the doctor, and looked at the wall. When he had at last finished with his hands he went to the bedside and said :

"Sit up a little . . . that's it! Now may I look?"

Genitchka helped the dying woman to undo her night-dress. She was cold, and ashamed of her lean shoulders and small shrunken breasts. She cowered down, trembling under the touch of the cold hard fingers, and instinctively covered her breast with her hands.

"There . . . breathe . . . again . . . once again. . . . You can lie down."

Then he turned back the bedclothes and indifferently examined the dreadfully swollen feet. The sick woman followed every movement with feverish shining eyes. Her hands trembled.

When the doctor got up he shook hands with her silently before turning away.

"What is it, Doctor?" she said with a stupendous effort in a hardly audible voice.

The doctor carelessly turned his cold face towards her; his glasses shone.

"Yours was not a case for the doctor, but for the priest," he said coolly.

Genitchka and Nelly rushed up to him thinking they must have misunderstood. The dying woman, on the contrary, did not utter a cry or even move. She looked silently and intently for some moments at his cold face. Then she smiled painfully.

" Well, you know, Doctor . . . that's really too cruel ! " The doctor shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly.

" As you wish. . . . I'm telling you the truth." He nodded his head and went away.

There was a long pause. The dying woman had closed her eyes. Genitchka and Nelly sat there stunned and dazed, not understanding their own thoughts. Several hours seemed to pass in this awful silence. Genitchka would have liked to cry and could not do so ; she tried to feel angry at the doctor's gesture, and in this, too, she was unsuccessful. Nelly gazed fixedly at the dying woman's loosened hair, at her closed eyes whose lashes quivered from time to time, and she made unutterable efforts to follow the thoughts that must be coursing through the dying brain with a force beyond the imagination of the living.

She was entirely obsessed by the one question, what were the sick woman's thoughts ?

Maria Pavlovna moved.

Genitchka hastened to her : " What do you want, Masha ? "

The sick woman looked at her with shining eyes :

" Give me the looking-glass. . . ."

Genitchka did not understand. Nelly hurried to fetch the glass and gave it to her.

The dying woman raised herself slightly and sat up, and her movements were strangely easy and light. She took the glass and looked long and silently at her bloodless, half-dead face. Apparently she was trying to understand something, to evoke some memory which might banish this image.

At length she sighed, her hands fell and she silently put down the glass. Then she asked for water, washed herself, combed her tangled hair for the last time and turned her face to the wall.

She remained like this several hours. A ghastly silence filled the whole house. Genitchka and Nelly sat at the table without moving, the servant in the kitchen was quiet. Only strange isolated sounds were wafted in from the street. They seemed to come from another world infinitely remote from this last horror.

In the twilight the dying woman moved, asked for some-

thing to drink and enquired, so tonelessly that she seemed already past caring, if Dr. Arnoldi had not yet arrived.

"He must be here soon. We've sent a message to his house to tell him . . ." answered Genitchka hastily, frightened at the sound of her own voice, which seemed strangely loud in the silent twilight

"Very well," replied the dying woman softly, and she turned to the wall once more.

Towards evening she began to toss to and fro, her shining eyes fixed on the door.

The horror of death came nearer and nearer. It filled the air, stealthily followed the evening shadows into the room, choking every breath, so that they longed to cry out, to escape, to run away no matter where.

It was late in the evening when quick, heavy footsteps were heard in the distant courtyard.

The dying woman sat up at once. Her eyes opened wide, their brilliance made her whole face radiant. The last frail spark of life glowed in that one look. The steps came rapidly nearer. Dr. Arnoldi's voice sounded on the staircase. Then he sprang upstairs and hurried through the rooms.

Suddenly the dying woman raised her hands with a gesture of despair. Her delicate lips were parted, her eyes wide open, a tremor passed over her whole body.

"Farewell, Doctor!" she cried, with such terrible hopeless misery that it echoed through the whole house.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE candles burnt high and clear, casting their quiet shadows into dim corners of the room. The folded dead hands, firmly clasping a cross, were motionless under the white muslin. The thin form of the corpse was almost covered by a heap of beautiful flowers. From behind the eternally closed eyelids it seemed to confront incomprehensible silence.

Dr. Arnoldi was sitting in a corner, gazing fixedly into space. His fat hands were crossed on his stick as usual, his hat was on his knees, as though he had only sat down to rest for a minute. Yet hours went by, the night deepened, and still the old doctor crouched alone in his corner, his head sinking further and further on to his breast.

Nelly sat in the next room. Eugenia Samoilovna, worn out with weeping, was asleep in her own bedroom; there was not a sound in the house. From time to time Nelly came inaudibly into the room with solemn face and knitted brows, went up to the table and gazed long and silently at the dead woman's face. Then she quietly straightened the shroud, arranged the flowers and went away again. She did not look at the doctor, seeming not to see him, and he did not stir when she came in.

Every one slept, and it was so dark and silent that Dr. Arnoldi sometimes thought he must be the only living creature left in the whole world, so deathly calm did everything seem.

Whenever the candles crackled, it sounded sharply through the whole house. When the flames wavered to and fro, the dead face had a look of animation, it seemed as though the eyes opened and smiled. A wild and joyous sensation assailed him: he imagined her still alive, watching his grief, longing to soothe and encourage him.

But time passed and still the dim profile was immovable under the muslin, and the hands clasped the cross.

That was she, the woman who had come into his life at a time when he had thought everything lay behind him. | Pale

and beautiful she had appeared, and had comforted him with the pure devotion of a dying woman in whose love there is no element but a sorrowful tenderness.

Life, which up till then had only been filled with anxiety and care, had given him great happiness, only to snatch it away again at once, leaving him to drag out an existence more joyless and empty than before.

He had no longer any strength to defy Fate's decree. Only his back stooped and his head sank deeper before the spectres of the coming years.

The night was over and cocks crowed warningly in the distance.

The grey morning dawned behind the light curtains. The yellow reflections of the candles crept over the dead face, giving way to the cold light of morning, which threw dull greenish shadows across it.

Some one began to stir in the house, a door creaked, some words were spoken, and then the strange sound of life died away. The new day had begun, the last day on earth for her.

Dr. Arnoldi got up quietly, went to the table and stood at her head. The closed eyes were very near, and the dear face held no terror for him. Then the pale yellow flames of the candles danced before him and spread into one clear light, walls and windows and everything else disappeared, and only her face remained before his eyes. Groaning, the old doctor bent low over her and kissed the pale fingers of her folded hands for the last time. Then he turned quickly away and went with bowed head from the room.

It was bright daylight outside.

CHAPTER XXXV

THE sound of the last carriages had died away, the watchman shut the heavy door and there was silence in the churchyard. The placid, contemplative stillness was typical of late summer evenings when the breath of approaching autumn steals through the freshened air. The crosses stood motionless, and motionless were the green mounds beneath which lay hidden the joys and sorrows of forgotten people. Small iron railings peeped through the twisted strands of ivy. Here and there the sun cast golden rays and lit up the letters of strange names in the shadow of the green fir trees.

Dr. Arnoldi wandered along the desolate paths and the avenues of crosses and monuments, a heavy black figure. Sometimes his steps echoed on the stones, and sometimes the iron point of his heavy stick squeaked as he paused by the ruins of some dilapidated overgrown monument. And the stillness, the everlasting peace of death went noiselessly with him.

Above a grave of yellow clay, hardly dry, golden letters shone on a white cross, and here Dr. Arnoldi paused involuntarily, sunk deep in thought.

"Here lie the mortal remains of the Professor in Ordinary at the University of Charkov, Ivan Ivanovitch Rasumovski. Lord, have mercy upon me when Thy kingdom cometh."

The mute letters echoed in the old doctor's ears like a plaintive lament, in which there lurks a secret hope : "Oh God, I stand here before Thee. The way marked out for me was hard. Now I am at my goal. . . . Let me not rest for ever in the grave. I implore Thee to give me joy and repose. I have earned them by my agonies which no mortal can understand. Thou alone knowest them, Thou alone seest them. Lord, shall my voice be stilled for ever, shall darkness encompass me as though I had never been . . . ?"

The figure of the old professor appeared mistily to Dr. Arnoldi as he had seen him on his last visit. He had seemed

better, his memory was clear and his brain worked like everyone else's. Weak and wasted he sat on the divan, smiling, and looking from time to time at the doctor, his wife, and Lida, and was pleased because they talked to him. How easily people forgot their sufferings ; not one of them, not the old professor himself, had believed that three hours later he would be a corpse.

" I wonder what he thought about it at the last ? " flashed through Dr. Arnoldi's mind. " Why did he laugh when they woke him ? "

This laughter stood like a mystery between life and death that no one could solve. Dr. Arnoldi shook his head gravely and walked slowly away from the old professor's grave.

" Naumoff is right. Every human thought and action can have only one end . . . death. Only human stupidity is immortal."

The sun had gone down and the distant crosses were merging in the approaching darkness. The green fir trees looked black, the patterns of the railings melted into the mouldering corners of the grave-stones. Dragging his stick after him, Dr. Arnoldi returned to where they had lavished so much incense and song that day, where all that was dearest to him lay buried, all that had come into his life too late.

Maria Pavlovna's grave was in a distant corner of the churchyard where there were no prosperous monuments with their pretensions to immortality. Only slender birch trunks stood against a low wall, already slowly crumbling, and in the midst of forgotten crosses a narrow path wound away, strewn with mouldering boards.

The sky was gradually darkening behind the wall. A few tits hopped up and down between the swaying branches or flew away into the twilight. One after another the tiny birds disappeared and the silence of the churchyard began to contract into the mystery of another world ; the crosses, monuments and trees were blurred into a single stupendous mass, and only at one indefinable point gleamed the flame of the undying lamp.

Dr. Arnoldi sat down heavily on an old seat which was quite soft from the soaking damp, and gazed at the grave, his hands crossed on his stick.

The grey mound, guarded by a green fir tree, imperceptibly lost its outlines in the cold blue of evening.

"When I die, Doctor, promise me that you will sit with me a little while in the churchyard when they have all gone away"—the voice sounded close to his ear.

"I will sit with you . . ." answered Dr. Arnoldi.

A last streak of the pale sunset died away between the delicate tracery of birch twigs. Darkness drew near from every side. When it had grown quite dark and the old crosses began to move like white shadows, a cold wind rose and rustled in the tree-tops, bending them towards the ground.

CHAPTER XXXVI

YELLOW leaves, dashed by the night rain and caught by the wind, floated like live things in the puddles, where the drooping branches of the wet acacias were tremulously reflected beside strips of grey sky. Everything looked clear and free after the rain.

Tchish tore along the streets in his shabby coat and goloshes, which were too small for him, cursing to himself.

" That confounded skinflint won't part with a penny—and mind you don't get inflammation of the lungs, running about like this. . . . Damn it all ! "

The mere thought of taking cold and being ill in this damp, desolate hole, all alone, far away from that life of which he had dreamt so long and so passionately, filled Tchish with the deepest despair. He felt so small, forsaken, and wretched that he could have wept.

" The whole life here . . . oh, the devil take it all ! "

The little student could not understand it at all ; he certainly had not been born to give lessons, to rush about with torn goloshes, to indulge in dreams that would never come true, and to die at last uselessly and aimlessly. It would be too futile. After all he, too, was a human being !

Why is everybody so sure that life was meant for thinking and feeling people ? He himself, a clever, thoughtful man, must starve and freeze and worry about the next day, whereas just those fools who can give nothing to life and are even harmful to it, live only for pleasure and do not care a rap for noble ideas ! The flower of mankind, the prophets whom humanity pretends to worship, the heroes who shrink from no sacrifice, all die in poverty and misery, and the dull, unthinking herd follows them to the grave ! The meanest and lowest have the best of everything : wealth, new inventions, fine houses, pretty women, honour, and luxury ; but the lot of those like himself, be they great or small, is want and privation ! . . . Thus it is and thus it will remain for all eternity ! Eternity ? What a

terrible word. This one word means the end, the death of everything! . . . But then it's all nonsense! Who is right, who is the wiser? The true Christians or those Rothschilds?

The little student tried to take heart again. He ought not to have considered the question at all; for questioning is almost like doubting, and one minute of doubt would suffice to efface his whole previous life and all that he revered and was accustomed to believe.

"It won't always be like this," he said to encourage himself, in order not to give way to his grief, and he stepped out so firmly that the cold mud bespattered him. "New times will come some day, and then other people will live. Life will be dominated by brains and talent . . . that will be fine. It will, it must be! Then there will be no more cares and no more torn goloshes! People will be free and happy, and their faces will glow!"

Tchish clenched his teeth with the fanatic's obstinacy and repeated aloud:

"*It will be, it will!*"

He imagined this radiant future as a kind of fine Sunday under the dome of a distant clear sky. It was incredible that there could be rain then, or cold and dirty weather. The penetrating light of this future irradiated his soul, his sorrow melted in its rays, and the glad fighting spirit returned.

The very raindrops danced more gaily under his goloshes.

But when the young student compared the father of his pupils, the bull-necked Tregulov and his reedy voice, with that unknown man of the future, whose clear face bespoke the artist and philosopher, he suddenly became so acutely aware of the enormous distance between them that his soul sank to the ground like a shot bird. It will be, it must be, certainly . . . but when? And where will he be then, the little student with the embittered heart, the torn goloshes and the shabby coat? He will be nowhere. And even his memory would be absurd.

Tchish looked up in furious reproach at the immense white sky, where the dark grey clouds moved imperceptibly; he looked up and smiled bitterly. Suddenly his rage broke out:

" Is the entire future of humanity worth the sufferings of one poor hungry student ? He thinks and dreams of it, as if that happiness were his own. His thoughts and anxieties are not for himself, and he could be far happier if he thought less of others and more of himself. Will those people of the future be worthy of his sufferings, will they fulfil his dreams ? Are not the sacrifices too great that we are making for them . . . those lucky devils of the future ? "

These thoughts flashed into his mind so suddenly and were yet so unfamiliar to him that Tchish was startled. He felt as though he had mortally insulted all that he held most dear and he hastily diverted his thoughts into another channel.

" You're getting sentimental, Kyril Dmitrievitch . . . hang it all, it looks as if the general moisture had softened your soul too. You want to pocket some of this happiness, do you ? . . . Wouldn't it be the best plan to drive a small bargain ! . . . And we'll leave all those grand ideas of humanity to the strong who don't find them too dull . . . damn it. . . . Curse the whole lot of them. . . ." The little student did not know himself for whom the imprecation was intended, but his heart leapt with rage.

The water squelched in his goloshes, the horrible penetrating damp crept into his boots and behind his collar. Tchish's anger was so violent that he was almost in tears.

He arrived thus at the end of the boulevard. The dirty gutter collected a few withered leaves and flowed down the alley where the two students Mishka and Davidenko had lived in the summer. Tchish was just turning the corner absent-mindedly when he remembered that his comrades had gone away long ago. He made an ill-humoured grimace.

" Oh, those lucky fellows ! " he thought with bitter envy. He saw in imagination the large town, the long rows of cabs, the black wave of humanity that streams incessantly along the pavements, the approach to the Grand Theatre, the noise of the trains, the evening sky illuminated by the reflection of a million lights. . . . How remote it all was.

The cold water splashed beneath his feet and slopped through the worn-out goloshes, the wind bent the miserable acacias, the wet roofs and fences glistened. How grey and depressing it was. It was so melancholy that he was driven

to seek consolation of some kind. And quite involuntarily, without noticing what he was doing, Tchish began to argue with himself.

"What has that to do with it, after all? . . . How does it affect us? There are books here too—and the theatre is only a distraction when all's said and done. Boredom is not the only reason for my unhappiness. Is it people? It's all the same, one can't see and get to know them all. And why should one, damn it."

Tchish imagined all the professors, authors, students, and artists of his acquaintance standing in a long row before him; he scrutinised their commonplace, uninteresting faces, and went on cursing wrathfully:

"The devil take the whole pack of them!"

His heart grew still heavier. The world was empty.

"My nerves are utterly run down," he thought. "Perhaps I ought to go to the club?"

He would have liked to chat, even if it had only been with Dr. Arnoldi, just to see a living creature, however dull he were.

But the hall of the club was empty and dark. The damp rainy window admitted but scanty light, and even that was the colour of lead. From the porter's alcove came a smell of watery soup, cheap tobacco, and dirty old people. There was not a single hat on the stand.

This had the effect on Tchish of a personal disaster. At first he could not believe it; he looked behind the partition. The porter was asleep, his face pressed against a dirty cotton cushion with light blue flowers, and the bare heels of his dirty feet were turned towards him.

Tchish crept away from the alcove on tip-toe, as though he had a guilty conscience, opened the door and closed it gently behind him. He would have felt ashamed if the porter should wake and see him, and guess how bored he was and how he longed to fasten on to somebody.

And once again Tchish strolled through the mud, his shoulders raised so that the wet should not creep behind his collar. There was nothing to be done but to go to his lesson.

CHAPTER XXXVII

It was dark and dirty in the schoolroom. The boys had evidently been playing about in the rain shortly before. The floor bore traces of fresh dirt and their moist woollen tunics smelt like a dog's damp coat. Tchish smoked, jerked his head to and fro, and finally began to hold forth on some episode in mediæval history which interested neither himself nor the children.

He often detected his thoughts in the act of hurrying a thousand miles away. But he hastily chased them back, raised his voice anxiously, and attacked his subject with renewed vigour. But the boys' stupidity resisted all efforts, so that Tchish's enthusiasm soon faded and he sank back into his former apathy.

If by chance any one had heard Tchish's expressionless recital of the glorious crusades, he would have been more inclined to suppose that the young student was repeating litanies beside a corpse.

Lisa came in softly, pale as a shadow.

"How do you do?" cried Tchish delighted. "How are you? Are you bored too?"

Lisa looked at him strangely, utterly astonished, pressed his hand gently, and took her accustomed place.

Tchish continued his lesson, stealing every now and then a furtive glance at the girl sitting quietly at the window.

The fading watery light fell on her thin face, her clear, childish eyes looked sadly at the white, dreary sky.

"She's not well," thought the little student. All the horrible gossip that had crept through the town sullying Lisa's body and soul flashed across his mind. That very day his landlady, a fat, greasy woman, bent on looking young at all costs, had said to him:

"It's a fact, she is expecting a child! . . . Dreadful! Such a young girl! . . ." And she had smiled coarsely and spitefully, as though Lisa were her personal enemy.

The little student was furious with these stupid, heartless

people who dragged such poor creatures down into the mire instead of pitying them.

"And they will drag her there," thought Tchish, full of grief and pity.

It was remarkable that since she had given herself to the man he despised from the depths of his soul, since she had done that for which he could find no excuse, Tchish had felt a sincere pity for Lisa which was almost affection. It was as though her fall had raised her in his estimation, and her naive childlike eyes, which he had formerly thought silly, now assumed an expression of holiness—like the sad, young eyes of a girl-martyr.

It caused him a sensation akin to grief when he realised that he was looking at her beautiful body, no longer pure, with the eyes of desire. That was very strange, too ; he, a clever man with no prejudices, had never felt like that towards married women : they had never aroused in him this low curiosity. As soon as Tchish had discovered these cynical ideas, he became particularly agreeable and friendly, and even endeavoured to adopt an exaggerated politeness towards her. And all the time he sincerely wished to help her in some way, and was vexed that he did not know how.

"Well, how are you ?" he asked again.

Lisa looked up at him in alarm. In whatever way she was approached, she seemed to scent a kind of cynicism behind it which hurt her.

"Pretty well," she answered quickly.

"Oh, if only the winter were over . . . one gets positively sick of this wretched wet weather," continued Tchish, straining every nerve to say something nice to her.

"Yes . . ." replied Lisa softly, and turned to the window, as though imploring to be left in peace, and her sad, questioning eyes pierced the white autumnal sky.

Tchish was silent ; bitterly he puffed thicker clouds of smoke from his cigarette. Hopeless grief bound his heart with its threads as fine as a spider's web.

"We're all strangers to one another ! We can't even be kind and comfort each other. Every one is lonely, each is unhappy in his own way and cannot share his woe with others."

A fat, bloated face appeared in the doorway and a sing-song voice said :

"Come, Lisa, father's calling you."

There was nothing remarkable in this request, yet, for some reason, Tchish and Lisa, and even the boys were struck by it. Tchish lost control of himself and dropped his cigarette, the boys pushed their books aside and stared curiously at their sister. Lisa did not move, only her hands began to tremble.

"Make haste!" repeated her mother, and vanished behind the door.

There was an oppressive silence for a time. Tchish was afraid to look at the girl, but the boys could not take their inquisitive, malicious eyes off her. Lisa tried to fix her gaze on the white sky. And again the rain pattered on the window and flowed over the panes in quick, crooked streams. At length the girl rose, and slowly left the room, without looking at any one.

Tchish's eyes followed her at first in confusion, but suddenly he stormed at the boys :

"Now then, have you finished your exercise? I'm waiting for it!" The boys looked in terror at his angry face and hastened to bury their heads in their books.

There was a long silence. Then muffled sounds could be heard from the next room. Tchish listened uneasily, at the same time dictating fresh exercises in an exaggeratedly loud voice to prevent the boys from hearing. It cut him to the quick; he experienced a sensation of torment, as though he were obliged to look on while a child was tortured without being able to make up his mind to protect it.

Suddenly a loud din resounded all over the house; a fearful tumult ensued, then there was a momentary lull, broken occasionally by Lisa's shrill, heartrending, despairing cries.

In a moment the little student, impelled by a supernatural force and hardly knowing what he did, had dashed from the room, and behind him rushed the boys, head over heels, their books flung aside.

In the next room Tchish collided with Lisa who ran towards him, covering her face with her hands, and beside himself with frantic rage he rushed up to the merchant

Tregulov, shouting, "What are you doing? Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Fat, bull-necked Tregulov, stupid as a cow, stared with his dull, half-crazy eyes at the young student who had appeared so suddenly.

For a moment they stood opposite to one another in silence, not realising what was happening. Then the merchant's face turned blue and swollen, his eyes darted from their sockets, and his lips began to tremble and quiver.

"What do you want?" he roared in a hoarse voice that resounded through the house. "Have you been with her too? . . . Get out, you carrion! Be off with you, or I'll bash your skull in!"

The purple face suddenly appeared close to Tchish's own, gigantic as in a nightmare. He had scarcely time to cry out while he instinctively shielded his face with his elbow:

"Don't touch me. . . ."

Something cracked, roared . . . an avalanche crashed down upon him. Once more the little student cried out plaintively like a hare, and almost losing consciousness, he fled in a panic out into the hall, seeing and knowing nothing. The furious shouting hung over him still, some one pushed him, shook him, would not let him get his arms into the sleeves of his coat. . . . He felt himself in the power of an irresistible force, but suddenly he was standing in the courtyard, right in the middle of a puddle, with only one golosh on, the other, for some unknown reason, clasped in his hand. His cap flew out behind him and splashed into the mud. The door was slammed again, and Tchish remained alone under the grey sky, whence innumerable tiny rain-drops poured unceasingly. He came to himself.

His hands and feet were trembling, his whole body shook and ached dully. The crushing recollection of his shame, his terrible humiliation and utter helplessness swept over him. Never yet in his whole life had he been so intensely and hopelessly conscious of his own futility. Davidenko's huge figure flashed across his mind and he longed desperately for his presence.

Completely stunned, Tchish put his goloshes into the puddle, drew them on, picked up his cap with trembling hands and wiped it carefully with the sleeve of his coat. He suddenly felt so intensely sorry for this poor old wet and

shabby cap, his lips began to quiver and bitter tears came into his eyes, shrouding everything from view.

He clenched his fists helplessly, bit his lips and rushed quickly out of the courtyard. The Tregulovs' servants, crowding together on the steps, pursued him with spiteful laughter.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

LISA was lying on her bed, her fair hair all disordered, her face buried in the pillow wet with tears. A slipper had fallen from one foot, which hung gracefully from the bed in the tight black stocking, not touching the ground.

The small room, whose window looked on to the damp, discoloured garden, was bare and comfortless. The books on the table, the looking-glass with its simple muslin decorations, the coloured post-cards on the walls were pathetic indications of all the little ordinary occurrences of a girl's life with its tender thoughts and dreams and innocent coquetry.

Terrible grief was in every line of the slim figure writhing on the bed in silent despair.

No one came into her room. Her father felt ill and lay on his bed like a mountain, purple and perspiring, his shirt-collar torn open. Now and again her mother, whose tear-stained, horrified face looked faded and worn with anxiety, peeped into the room and went out again wringing her hands. She had completely lost her head in this irreparable misfortune which had burst in upon them so unexpectedly ; she went about the house like a mad woman, crossing herself before the images of the saints, wringing her hands and moaning softly :

" Oh, my God, Mother of God, what is to become of us ! What will happen now ? My Lisa, my Lisotchka. . . . "

She recalled vividly the time of Lisa's birth, how she had fed and carried in her arms the little rosy Lisotchka who had regarded the great world with her wide-open blue eyes, dribbled, and patted with her tiny hands her mother's face, then young and pretty. Who would have thought of such a thing then ! My God !

Lisa wept, buried her head more deeply in the pillows, seeing and hearing nothing of what went on around her. Her whole face seemed torn to pieces by the heavy blow on her cheeks. But she felt no pain. All was dead within her.

Only a maddening weight oppressed her, traversed by feeble thoughts.

Before her closed eyes in a red mist was her father's huge swollen face, so unfamiliar that she hardly recognised it. Lisa could only dimly remember what had happened. She did not even realise how her father had found out. She did not hear his words, she was so stunned by fear and shame. She had only the vague impression that he had stripped off all her clothes and thrashed her. When he had paused for a moment, breathless and only able to look at her furiously, as though he did not know what to do with her next, Lisa had not moved from the spot, but seemed rooted to the ground. He might have killed her at that moment and she would not have uttered a sound. . . . But suddenly a shameful cruel word—a vile insult of the streets—was flung in her face. The girl opened her eyes wide, groaned and staggered.

"Oh, not that . . ." she had cried out in terror.

And as if this word had been needed to give him the right impetus, her father flung out his hand and struck her in the face with all his might.

For a moment Lisa had almost lost consciousness. Then she covered her face with both hands, cried out and rushed away, not knowing where, followed by a hail of coarse invectives which clung to her like lumps of mud.

She did not come to herself till she had been in her room a long time. One or two hours passed in this state of dazed apathy. Then, as though at last she had grasped the whole horror of what had occurred, she looked wildly round, wrung her hands and thrust her face into the pillows. She seized the head of the bed, her whole body writhing in uncontrollable hysteria, bit her hands and the pillows, gave one shrill cry and then sank into a stupor.

She lay motionless in this strange silence.

She did not reflect or think about the future, knowing only that she was lost and that now there could be no return to her quiet past. A dead void stretched before her.

"I can't go on living!" . . . she said to herself with a dull calm, and it seemed quite simple and clear.

She saw the yellow sluggish river of her birthplace, overflowing its banks after the heavy rain. Lisa felt its chill

almost as though she had already thrown herself into its muddy depths. There was a ghastly silence in her soul ; as in a dream she remembered all her past life, with its thousand trifles, the glorious sun, the green garden, all the dear, cherished things she would never see again . . . and suddenly she thought of Dchenieff.

Her heart quivered as though it had been struck, and contracted in an agony of grief. She realised that she would never see him again. She pressed her hands convulsively to her breast, and almost fainted under the overwhelming torrent of desire for his love.

"For his sake !" flashed clearly through her mind. She was overcome by a terrible delight that she had suffered so much for her lover's sake.

So be it ! . . . She is willing to suffer still more, to cross endless tracts of humiliation and shame, if it is only for his sake, because she loves him so. . . . In fact it seems that she has suffered very little for such stupendous happiness as his love.

She longed to rush to him, to cling to him and submit to his will. For a second the unconscious hope sprang up within her that he would have pity on her, caress her and take her to himself, that she might always be with him, only with him, only and entirely his ! . . . The memory of his embraces stole gently over her, stirring the inmost depths of her soul. And in her heart trembled the suppressed thought, bright and quivering as a little dancing sunbeam, of his child. It overpowered her so suddenly that Lisa coloured with a sweet blush of shame ; for one moment she forgot all that had happened.

Yet at once she felt terribly frightened at having dared to dream of such happiness. He was so handsome, so exceptionally clever, she so small and stupid and simple.

Her tender heart contracted painfully ; but at the same time a thought forced its entrance and grew more and more powerful :

Well, so be it . . . so be it, though she may never again belong to him and never be happy . . . though he does not love her and never can . . . though he should forsake her . . . Let them spit at her and expose her to unendurable degradation . . . so be it ! . . . If he forsakes her . . . she

will die. That is quite simple and obvious. But as long as she can be anything at all to him, little though it be, she will live, obey him in everything, endure everything.

And as she pressed her tortured face, streaming with tears, against the pillows, she thought :

“ Love . . . love . . . my love ! ”

She could think of nothing else.

CHAPTER XXXIX

TCHISH hurried breathlessly along the boulevard, muttering to himself, and trying at the same time to suppress the palpitation of his heart. His sharp bird-like face was burning, his eyes were restless, his whole body quivering.

It was growing dark. It was still drizzling and the wet blue twilight crept over the boulevard, slowly enveloping the lank acacias which melted into the gloom like melancholy ghostly shadows. On the other side of the square which was drenched in liquid mud, shone the lights of the street lamps and their reflections danced in the large puddles. He met a few passers-by shuffling along in their goloshes, with their coat-collars turned up. Tchish saw nobody. He was alone in the whole world, of no use to anybody, degraded and miserable.

All his usual ideas had vanished from his mind. As in a nightmare he was pursued by laughter and mocking cries, insults and blows. Only the one unbearable fact was clear, that he had been taken by the collar, beaten and thrown out of the house ; his heroics had simply been pitiable and ludicrous. With what keen delight could he seize the fat merchant by the throat, press him against the wall and strike him in the face—strike him till his hands were weary ! . . . And the burning desire for coarse primitive strength, for powerful fists, was bound up with the hopeless sense of his weakness, with the physical aversion from any words of consolation.

Tchish could scarcely breathe. As though delirious, he bit his trembling lips, clenched his fists, shuffled right through the puddles, seeing nothing and repeating senselessly :

“ In the face . . . in the face . . . in my face ! ”

But at the very moment when he groaned aloud in despair, some one called him by name.

Tchish started, stood still and looked long at the tall grey figure of Ryskoff, the accountant's clerk, without recognising who had suddenly come up to him.

"Good evening, Kyril Dmitrievitch. Where are you going to?" asked Ryskoff, trying to coax a grin on to his long equine face with the damp drooping moustache.

"I?" asked Tchish. "I . . . am going home."

At any other time he would have wondered why Ryskoff had stopped him. They hardly knew each other and had only exchanged a few words. But now it was all indifferent to him, and he remained standing like an automaton in the middle of the pavement, clasping Ryskoff's cold damp hand.

"Won't you come in with me for a minute or two? I don't live far from here," asked Ryskoff, apparently delighted by the coincidence.

"That too? Why that?" thought Tchish, who realised nothing and was still occupied with his own affairs.

"I should really be so pleased, and so would my mother—we've known each other a long time now—you must have tea with us—I have been wanting to ask you for some time, but I was always so afraid of worrying you."

"Why does he push himself on me like this, damn it?" uneasily thought the little student, who saw continually before his eyes the one unfading picture, how he had been seized by the scruff of his neck and flung out, his only old cap hurled after him into the mud. And never, never could he be revenged, and they had all seen it, and every one would know that he had been thrashed.

"I should very much like . . . really . . . your opinion"—Ryskoff went on talking about something, still clasping Tchish's hand in his cold damp fingers.

Tchish wanted to reply that he was busy, but a strange indifference overcame him. He consented almost mechanically.

"Do come, I live here; it's only a few yards. I am very glad, very—you don't know what a pleasure it is to me"—Ryskoff hastened to assure him with such delight that Tchish was really surprised.

For some reasons he was ashamed that Ryskoff was trying to curry favour with him; on the other hand, however, it was a relief suddenly to realise that there were still those who regarded him as a higher being in spite of all humiliations and insults.

They went on. They had nothing to talk about, and

Tchish could not bring himself to do so. Again and yet again he lived through his shame with a thousand variations. What had happened seemed ineffaceable and irreparable : it would remain a plain fact all the years of his life. He could hardly endure this thought any longer ; indeed, at times life seemed to have become altogether intolerable. But as the thought of suicide was unfamiliar and anti-pathetic to his nature, his meditation was lost in a dull mist, and he dreaded to reflect further on what must happen.

Ryskoff hurried on ahead, obviously anxious lest it should be too far for Tchish. He walked intentionally through the puddles, so that the dry places were left for Tchish.

It was quite dark and everything was deep blue around them when they arrived at their destination. The wretched windows of the small sloping side-wing looked despondently and miserably on to the crooked, deserted street. The wet grass of the Steppes crept timidly under the damp fences, the rain poured down unceasingly and in the distance a vague human form loomed through the mist. Everything around was soaking, paltry and desolate. No light shone from the black windows of the houses, so that one might have thought the whole street was uninhabited.

While Ryskoff, who did everything hurriedly and with many excuses, lighted the lamp, Tchish mechanically took off his drenched coat, threw it over a chest and stood in the middle of the room, not knowing what to do next.

The lamp burnt up slowly, and gradually there emerged from the smoky gloom, not without dignity, as though desirous of introducing themselves to the visitor, antediluvian red chairs with torn cotton covers, a protruding cupboard behind whose dusty glass cups were arranged, figured curtains, picked flowers on the window-sills, and numerous faded photographs in thin cardboard frames. There was a pungent stifling smell of feather-beds and the oil-lamp before the image. The low ceiling, from which was suspended a smoky Cross of the Passion Week, was close above their heads. Humble, despised life lurked in every corner.

"Do sit down," said Ryskoff hastily, "and I'll just make you a cup of tea—yes, do have just a little one . . . one minute ! "

He hurried out excitedly, while Tchish, who was not yet fully conscious or able to realise how he had come there, sat down stiffly at the window and looked around him curiously.

At length Ryskoff hurried in again with the boiling samovar, accompanied by a thin, short-sighted old woman carrying a tray.

Tchish controlled himself and rose unsteadily. Ryskoff put the samovar on the table, remarking carelessly and awkwardly as he did so, "My mother."

Tchish greeted her with equal hesitation, supposed he ought to shake hands, but did not do it. The old woman opened her eyes wide in alarm, returned the greeting, and sat down at the table, without averting her curiously fixed gaze from Tchish's face.

Tchish thought it necessary to open a conversation with her.

"I've come to pay your son a visit, you see," he said rather more loudly than necessary, as though she were deaf.

The old woman blinked her dim eyes.

"You're being spoken to, mother!" observed Ryskoff without looking at her.

"Very nice indeed, I'm most grateful to you," she said, her face lengthening.

But suddenly and unexpectedly her eyes brightened. Something like expression enlivened their dullness.

"It's such a pleasure for my Sashenka. He is always alone with me, quite alone with me. He has no friends. . . . I beg your pardon."

She bowed to him for no reason at all.

"Yes, certainly. . . . I am also . . ." murmured Tchish.

The spark of life in the old woman's dim eyes flickered up more brightly; she was now looking at and speaking to the young student with such animation that it was obvious that she meant to talk for about three hours longer.

"We don't live in luxury, and seldom have visitors. It's no use. The salary is small. Sasha only gets twelve roubles. They promised him a rise, but he doesn't seem to have satisfied them all. But Sasha's an angel; he keeps me, an old woman, and he's still a young man, and would like to take things easily, and be with his friends. His health is

poor, certainly. . . . And so we live ! . . . God be praised that we don't starve."

The old woman looked wearily into Tchish's eyes ; she talked as though his only object in coming had been to hear the whole joyless story of her life. It was difficult to understand her, and Tchish felt as uncomfortable as though he were partially responsible for her misery. Ryskoff sat hunched up at the table, and did not look at his guest.

" His father is dead, God give him eternal blessedness ; he went to his work for thirty-seven years. Rain or frost, he simply put a comforter round his neck—he had a cold—and went off to his work. He was most accurate in his work, and he was appreciated by the authorities, and when he died we received a pension of three roubles."

Tchish could not distinguish whether the old woman spoke with pride or reproach of these three roubles. And is it actually much or little for the life of an accountant's clerk ? In his imagination he saw the monotonous miserable clerk going to the same work in rain and frost for thirty-seven years with his ears wrapped up, sitting on an identical chair all his life and dying without leaving a trace. Just as though he had never and nowhere existed, except in the comic papers ! There was something ghastly in this human life—human, after all—that could be lived out entirely on one worn chair.

" And so we live. . . . But living costs so much nowadays ! . . . Whatever one wants . . . we simply can't afford it ! If only a better position could be found for Sasha ! Perhaps you would use your influence among your acquaintances."

The old woman bowed again and stared at Tchish, hungrily expectant. He was just going to promise that he would do his best when it occurred to him that he had no possibility of doing so. He became embarrassed, looked away from her as though he felt it to be his own fault, and shrugged his shoulders in exaggerated sympathy.

Ryskoff unexpectedly came to the rescue.

" Please, mother, I think . . . you don't care to do so, I'm sure . . ." he murmured without raising his eyes.

The old woman started, looked first at him and then at

Tchish and blinked in silence, while Ryskoff gently fingered the fringe of the tablecloth.

There was something altogether remarkable about these movements, some of which were superfluous and affected, others abstractedly thoughtful, not in the least suggesting the Ryskoff who sauntered down the boulevard with his walking-stick and despised the world from the heights of his uncomprehended greatness.

They were all silent for some minutes. Tchish stirred the weak tea with his spoon and for no reason whatever tried to extricate a morsel of the softened lemon.

Finally Ryskoff came obviously to a decision. He began to move with unnatural ease, smiled and said in a voice that shook with agitation :

“ I want to ask you a favour, Kyril Dmitrievitch.”

“ What is it ? ”

“ You know, I . . . once . . . wrote a short story. . . . I should so much like your opinion. . . . You know, I have so much spare time, and so . . . ”

He broke off, blushing. Tchish, who suddenly became equally confused, blushed no less. But there was so much shame, fear, hope, and entreaty in Ryskoff’s expression that Tchish answered as tactfully as possible in spite of his constraint :

“ Oh, certainly, I shall be delighted. But I’m no critic.”

Ryskoff brightened and clapped his hands.

“ Not, no . . . what do you mean. . . . You have read so much . . . and besides—a student ! There is no one else here to whom I could appeal. I have read it aloud to my colleagues. . . . They like it ! ”

Ryskoff paused a moment, but when he looked at Tchish and saw that the young student attached no importance to the approval of accountant’s clerks, he continued hastily :

“ You know, I always had such a taste for it from my childhood. . . . And so much spare time, of course, I should very much like you to . . . ”

“ Very well, give it to me, and I’ll read it,” consented Tchish.

Ryskoff blushed still more hotly ; he would much rather have read the story aloud himself, in order to emphasize the passages which seemed to him particularly moving. He

had so longed for this moment. At the same time the ridiculous idea flashed through his mind that Tchish might make use of his story for his own advantage.

"Perhaps you would do it at once! Excuse my pressing you like this, but I should like to read it aloud to you. . . . My writing is not very clear. . . . You know, when one's at work one hasn't much leisure for copying."

"Oh, very well." Tchish realised the impossibility of shaking him off.

Ryskoff started up at once, tore open his coat, and took his story, which he always carried about with him, out of his pocket. It was written in a thin school exercise-book with a blue check cover.

"May I begin, then?" he asked almost pleadingly, as if he could not yet credit the permission.

"Please do."

Ryskoff pulled the lamp roughly towards him, straightened the tablecloth, opened the book with trembling fingers, swallowed several times and then read in a hesitating voice :

"Love. . . A Story by Alexander Ryskoff."

The little student looked down hastily and did not raise his eyes till it was finished.

Ryskoff was terribly excited : his voice shook, his lips were dry, red spots and perspiration covered his face. Apparently all was dark before his eyes, so that he read with difficulty. With forced carelessness he remarked as it were incidentally :

"It's not quite finished yet. . . ."

And then he read the story of a poor clerk, an unspeakably noble youth, with a high white brow and soft, waving, chestnut hair, who fell in love with the beautiful daughter of Count N., who for some reason lived in the same county town. The splendid youth met her by chance and entranced her with his enthusiastic face and the nobility of his soul. With deadly sarcasm he scoured the banality of her social life and the aristocrats who surrounded her, in whom Tchish easily recognised all the principal inhabitants of the little town : the district judge, the directors of the board of revenue, Arbusoff . . .

The beautiful countess would have liked to bestow her love upon the noble hero, but a gulf divided them ; she

did not know what bliss awaited her if she sank into the arms of this youth, and in the end she preferred to marry old Prince N. N.

And then the handsome boy received an invitation (the reason for which was not very clear) to dine with Count N. on the occasion of the announcement of his daughter's engagement. The countess, radiant in beauty and a white dress, kissed her fiancé, without even glancing at our hero. Terrible contempt and grief filled the noble youth ; he could endure it no longer and his heart broke. Then everybody guessed that they had heedlessly overlooked a great soul, but the countess flung herself down by the poor boy's corpse with tears of remorse and gave him the first and last kiss. . . . Such a kiss that the author longed to bring his hero back to life, and himself began to blink that he might not burst into tears.

The story ended on the handsome youth's grave, where weeping willows grew with fabulous speed and a most beautiful unknown lady brought flowers every day, lamenting and weeping for the happiness that might have been.

" And the willows whispered a sad song . . ." concluded Ryskoff with a trembling voice, then broke off and was silent.

Tchish, who felt his cheeks burning, had observed with horror the approaching end of the tale. He perceived by Ryskoff's shaking voice and the vacancy of his strained glances as they wandered over the room that it was of tremendous significance to the accountant's clerk, and that a word from him would be enough to raise him to the highest heights or to crush him utterly.

It was evident that the clerk in his miserable office, sitting over the penny receipts and the savings-books of the village priests, had been dreaming in secret of the great world, of a wonderful life, a marvellously poetical love, some radiant happiness !

The young student felt obliged to make some remark, as every minute of silence tortured Ryskoff and only increased the awkwardness of the situation. But nothing occurred to him.

" Damn it all, what shall I say ! " surged in his brain—he became more and more restless because he did not doubt that the one word which he was about to utter would be of

more importance to Ryskoff than his whole previous life, but he could not find it in his heart to deal him such a blow.

He seized the manuscript mechanically, glanced again at the title. . . . He wished to postpone the moment, to find some excuse. . . . So he pretended to look for certain passages and re-read them, turning the leaves at the beginning and end of the story. But it was impossible to delay any longer. Tchish wandered wearily through the end for the third time, and then, bathed in perspiration, he laid the manuscript down, as gently as though it had been made of glass, and began to puff at his cigarette without looking at Ryskoff.

While the little student turned the pages of the manuscript, Ryskoff's soul had experienced every human emotion : fear, shame, pride, hope, and despair. At first, after reading it aloud, he thought his own story appallingly stupid. . . . Then suddenly he was convinced that Tchish must immediately realise the significance of the man with whom he had been brought in contact, and already the words flashed through his mind with which the student, excited and enthusiastic, would turn to him. Something of this sort :

“ Is it possible that you wrote that ? ”

And then the little student, this splendid, refined person, who alone was capable of understanding and appreciating him, would clasp his hand, while he modestly shook his head, smiling bitterly.

“ Yes, there you see it ! . . . And what suffering, what loneliness I've had to bear in my life ! How could it be otherwise, indeed ; such as I can expect no recognition and no reward ! ”

“ Y—yes . . . ” came at last from Tchish's lips.

Ryskoff started and became absolutely motionless at the sound of his voice. And as though he had risen from the dead, a tumult of sensations awoke in him ; his whole body and soul strained towards Tchish, in order to miss no word, no movement of his face.

But Tchish paused again.

“ Well, what do you think of it ? ” stammered Ryskoff with his stiff tongue. And, surprised at himself, he added with assumed carelessness :

" Of course it's only . . . a trifle. . . . I should like to hear your candid opinion."

He did his best to look indifferent, but his face was burning as though it were a matter of life or death.

The young student inhaled the smoke from his cigarette in desperation before he said with an incredible effort :

" You see . . . there's certainly something in it . . . "

Ryskoff's soul was tense as a violin string, liable to snap at the slightest careless touch.

" For instance . . . the part where he meets the countess out for a walk and . . . altogether . . . "

Ryskoff nodded his head violently. He imagined the passage vividly—the best in the whole story—certainly ! . . .

" But on the whole the story is—" continued the little student, unable to think of anything else to say.

Everything swam before Ryskoff's eyes, and the blood rose to his head.

" You see, to be an author," he heard Tchish say at what seemed a great distance from him, "the great thing is to have a literary education. You have probably read very little. . . . You write just as if you only knew a few penny novelettes. And why must it be a countess ? An author should only write of what he knows, but you have never seen any of these aristocrats close to."

A grey pallor overspread Ryskoff's long sallow face quickly and evenly. Although the little student had taken pains to speak gently and tactfully, the clerk had grasped his meaning at once : that his story was worthless, that he had no talent and would never become an author, but that he must live and die a paltry wretched clerk, as he was now. All the dreams faded on which his soul had feasted so long ; behind them loomed the dull grey countenance of truth.

All in vain he had proudly carried the story in his pocket and looked down contemptuously upon the entire circle of his acquaintances who did not know that a great man walked in their midst. It had all been in vain, stupid and ridiculous !

With one last effort to cling to something, Ryskoff asked shyly :

" But you praised that one passage . . . "

Tchish blushed. He was almost ashamed of having lost

courage for a moment, of not daring to speak the truth. And then he remembered how wretched he was himself, and how cruelly his own feelings had been hurt that day.

"I said that out of kindness . . ." he said cuttingly, brokenly, as though he wanted to be revenged on Ryskoff for his own misery. "In reality it's just as bad as the rest. . . . No, it's not so easy to write. . . . It's not given to all of us. . . . Leave such tricks alone!"

Ryskoff hung his head.

The little student, however, seized the manuscript in a fit of incomprehensible excitement and, mercilessly wrenching the pages apart, he read each passage aloud, explaining its deficiencies, almost gibing at them.

Ryskoff felt as though the young student held his own bleeding heart. He listened, pale and mute, his long sallow face downcast, without understanding the words. Now he realised himself that it was all hopelessly futile, every word of his story struck him like a box on the ears. He cowered still more and his head sank further on to his breast.

The little student became more and more ecstatic. He dropped Ryskoff's manuscript and proceeded to hold forth upon literature in general, speaking with passionate love and rapture.

"Ah, my friend! . . . Talent—that means such power, such beauty! . . ." he cried, and then it struck him that something strange was happening to Ryskoff.

He broke off abruptly and looked attentively at the clerk. There was a look of terrible despair in his small eyes, gazing fixedly downwards. His hands twitched convulsively at the tablecloth, as though they must cling to something.

"But why the devil should you take it to heart so? . . ." asked Tchish perplexed. "Is it possible that you seriously thought. . . . Well . . . must it be literature? Every one can't be an author. As if there were nothing else to do in life. There are many beautiful things besides literature. Life is so rich, and everybody can make it interesting in his own way. One mustn't lose heart."

Ryskoff raised his ashen face, looked at Tchish and said dully and even calmly:

"What sort of life . . . is there . . . for me!"

The little student was in a fresh dilemma.

He stared at Ryskoff as though he saw him for the first time, and all at once he realised that all his fine talk about the splendour and significance of life was quite inappropriate to this case. What beauty, what meaning could there be for these Ryskoffs ? It's wonderful for the heroes to die for Life's sake, but to decay slowly and unnoticed, only to fertilise the soil of the future, who presumes to demand that from mankind ? Yet but for their wretched existence there would be no beauty. Heroes and leaders construct the majestic edifices of their lives from those corpses. They must perish, that the magnificent flowers of human greatness may blossom from their fermenting dust. And how many are they who are born to fertilise the earth ? How shall they be recompensed ? Yes, it is true : life is immeasurably grand and beautiful. But not for the Ryskoffs.

While Tchish looked pitifully and compassionately at Ryskoff, he suddenly saw himself as though entirely detached : the hungry, freezing little student who tramped about aimlessly and cheerlessly in misery, that he might not starve, without talent, mediocre, himself only average. . . . A chill pierced his soul, and he was silent, confused and stunned.

Ryakoff also was silent, staring at the ceiling. The blue exercise-book lay half-open in front of them.

"What for ?" the little student thought bitterly. "The talents may be sublime, the leaders illustrious, and the fierce battle titanic, but we humble folk want to be just as splendid and illustrious and talented ! Who made a choice between us, who had the right to use just myself and Ryskoff as a foundation for the mighty ? A foolish accident ? But we don't want accidents ! "

The little student felt oppressed and heavy-hearted. Something gripped his throat.

Then suddenly a timid, eager voice broke the stillness : "Will Sashenka get much for his story ? "

Tchish looked round startled. The long sallow face with the dim lifeless eyes stared at him. She had not understood a word.

While Ryskoff had been reading aloud she was astonished that her Sashenka had written so much ; while Tohish was

speaking she only wondered whether his words were of good or evil significance for Sashenka.

Tchish looked at her with secret terror. These eyes petrified him : all that her son had written and dreamt, all around her and above her, the whole world with its stars and mysteries, its grandeurs and tragedies, it was all so infinitely remote from her. . . . And yet she, too, was a human being !

Therein lay the terrible absurdity. The very existence of such a human being gave the death-blow to all the harmony which man had created between reason and the universe. Something began to stir in his brain, but, incapable of reducing the chaos to order, and impelled by his dread of those dull, imploring eyes, he rose quickly from his seat to go away.

The courtyard was dark as the grave. The rain had just stopped, but the wind had risen. It flew invisibly up to Tchish, tugged at the skirts of his coat, flung cold drops in his face and drove him into the mud at the street corners. It was impossible to see three paces ahead. The houses scarcely loomed through the darkness, and on either side towered huge ghosts, swaying wildly hither and thither with hairy hands. They seemed to want to stoop down over the little student running through the gloom : they crashed together menacingly above his head with muffled rustlings.

Tchish rushed home ; he felt as lonely as if he were solitary on the whole gigantic surface of the earth. For the first time the young student clearly grasped the idea that he was not walking on anything firm and immovable, but on a limitless mass that rolls with frenzied speed through the void and darkness of infinity.

Suddenly the little student's attention was attracted by the light in the chinks of the shutters which protected Cornet Krause's windows. Involuntarily Tchish pictured the tall strange cornet, all alone in the lighted room, thinking. . . .

"The deuce !" he swore to himself as he looked with a curious dread at the dark chasm which surrounded him, seemingly inhabited only by the moist wind and the rustling which pressed in upon him from every side.

CHAPTER XL

Two candles were burning in Cornet Krause's room. They were placed somewhat peculiarly opposite one another—on two corners of the open card-table as if left there after the conclusion of a game of ombre.

The cornet himself was sitting at the little table, tall and straight, while Naumoff paced up and down the room, his misshapen shadow hurrying along the wall beside him. He remained the whole time with one side turned towards the light, so that only his profile and his glittering eyes were visible. This gave him a ferocious, terrifying look.

"I don't understand you," said the cornet coldly; "if you think it's possible to live yourself, why shouldn't every one else live too? I quite agree with you, that life's all nonsense, but that doesn't matter. You live, although you realise that; how much more should others live who don't do so."

Naumoff looked across at him.

"I? . . . I live because my theory is stronger than myself."

"What do you mean by that?"

"I mean that I am in the power of my theory: I can't die before I've said the last word, before I've done all I can to spread my theory in the world! If I only found it hard to live, if my life didn't satisfy me personally, and if at the same time I knew it to be full of the finest possibilities, then it would be a different thing. I should shoot myself and shouldn't waste five minutes thinking about it! By far the majority of people are profoundly unhappy and utterly dissatisfied with their lives, and only go on living because they believe life in its essence is beautiful. Only they don't just happen to be favoured by fortune, but one fine day it might be kind to them too, as their lives are full of such possibilities. . . . Every one thinks he will get the whip-hand of all evil some day and win life's good-will. In this futile hope, based on nothing, they all live."

"Yes, that's true!" said the cornet very thoughtfully, obviously making a mental note of this train of thought for his own use.

Naumoff paid no apparent attention to his exclamation, but continued, while he strode violently from one corner to the other.

"Possibly the awakening from those dreams of immortality, of Paradise, of a just God, is concealed in this eternal hope of a happier morrow, in this senseless belief that life must sooner or later show itself in its true, beautiful colours. And as we know that we shall all die sooner or later, we have to leave this hope a loophole until the last moment: and when the last day really comes, and with it our final hopes of earthly joy, then the new morrow will certainly dawn 'there.' Yes, and not only one day, but a whole eternity. For if you're going to dream at all—then take all you can get: what is one day? Well, then, let it be eternity! What is there in this: the splendid face of life? . . . But now look: the face of eternity, of God, of Paradise . . . that's another matter."

Naumoff stood still, as though he had been reminded of something.

"Yes, I've wandered from the point. Did you speak? Yes, I say that if it were only a question of my own misfortunes, I wouldn't console myself with sweet hopes of to-morrow, but simply and calmly put a bullet through my head, without making a will or even leaving a note appropriate to such an occasion. It would be all the same to me. But I cannot die, because I don't hate *my* life, but human life, and as long as this enemy of mine exists, I can't go away. I must fight him to my last gasp. I shall proclaim it, run my head against the wall, call out and give a helping hand."

"A helping hand?" asked Krause suddenly for no reason, with an expression of indifference.

Naumoff glanced hastily at him and stood still. His eyes were sharpened as though he were trying to pierce the depths of the cornet's soul. But Krause's face was inscrutable in its arrogant coldness. One might have thought he was not in the least interested in what Naumoff said, but that he was thinking of some personal affair. Naumoff looked long and keenly at him. Then he half closed his

eyes and smiled malignantly, brazenly, as though he no longer considered it necessary to conceal the aim and object of his conversation with Krause.

"Why, certainly!" he said in a defiant tone. "I have enough faith in my theory and my determination not to flinch even from being cruel. My hand shall not shrink from slaying one of those idiots who cry 'Hail, beautiful Life!' while they writhe in agony. One human being less—one step forward."

"But who gives you the right to shed blood?" the cornet asked coldly.

"Who? . . . Myself! . . . I believe, and that's enough. I have nourished my faith with tears and blood, in that secret struggle for a happier future, in the days when I was as foolish as all the others. The idea occurred to me for the first time, quite hazily at first, while I was imprisoned in the fortress awaiting the inevitable death-sentence. Then the theory suddenly took shape, not as a logical conclusion, no, only as the presentiment of a conclusion. Then I realised at last in my whole being that I no longer dreaded death . . . and up till then I had feared it terribly. Death—yes, execution—the horror of it—but all that isn't important! . . . Well, then, what was important? I walked up and down my cell from end to end and meditated. I felt that a special process was going on within me, that I severed myself from the earth, became as it were transparent, as though all my sensations were purified to the uttermost. I felt that my brain must be made of crystal, that it could no longer contain any dark, mysterious parts. One minute more, and I should see everything clearly, should recognise in all things the beginning and the end! Afterwards that passed, and a dull, terrible fatigue overcame me; I never again experienced such a wonderful exaltation. I lay down and slept for a very long time. And when I woke it became clear to my innermost self that all my old ideas had perished to make way for something new. I no longer thought of heroism, of sacrifice, of progress, of revolution and the triumph of the proletariat! . . . I saw only one thing, that I should be hanged the next day and should not even know what had become of all those aspirations. Then I realised the absurdity of it all with appalling clearness and began to loathe it.

I remember also one other moment : when I really came out of the fortress at last, back to the freedom and life that I had given up for lost, stood on the bridge that leads to the town, and looked about me ; it suddenly seemed as though I were only pretending to be alive and at liberty, that I was really dead, because in reality I had been hanged that morning with the well-lathered rope. . . . It was an hallucination, but so vivid that I distinctly felt the rope round my neck. Yet everything was as it used to be : the steamboats sailed down the river, the spring sky was blue, the new grass was verdant on the islands, people walked and drove past as though nothing had happened. . . . What astounded me most was the general expression of joy in the spring, the sun, the green fields. They were intoxicated with joy ! . . . But it was nowhere apparent that I had died that morning, had been hanged in a lathered noose, had gone through the agony of the death-struggle. . . . My death dissolved in the rays of the sun, faded in the joy of life. . . . I was dead, but life remained as it had been before ! I can't describe the hatred which shook me from head to foot ! And then and there I swore to dedicate all my strength to the fight against this accursed, shameless life."

"And do you believe in the success of your campaign ? " asked Krause quietly.

"No . . . I do not. But I believe that—if a theory is once evolved in the brain of only one man it can never perish ; if it has once come into the world, it must and will persist till the end."

Krause looked at him and his eyebrows contracted.

Naumoff was silent for a while, standing still, and swaying backwards and forwards from his heels to his toes. His gleaming eyes were riveted on the candle's flame, apparently seeing nothing. No doubt his thoughts, stimulated by his memories, laboured violently on. Suddenly he laughed. Krause looked at him questioningly.

" You know, Krause, when this theory took possession of me, one thing restrained me . . . just what you asked me : whether I had the right to. The consciousness of my insignificance in the immensities of life crushed me and robbed me of my strength. I saw myself like a grain of sand

rebelling against the hurricane that carries it away. It was too funny : a grain of sand and a hurricane ! . . . I had to find support within myself, to believe in the magnitude of my individuality so that I could oppose it to the whole universe, to the universal will, God . . . or whatever else there may be. For a long time I did not succeed and tormented myself with the recognition that I was a speck of dust and nothing more. But since then I have realised that that was not the case, that I was not this trifle, but myself . . . and once an amusing idea occurred to me ! ”

Krause raised his eyebrows, but said nothing.

“ I remember, this was how I argued : certainly everything that exists must be in close and inseparable connection, for if there were a division even in one place, there would be a vacuum elsewhere, and the downfall of everything would come to pass ! For then it would all be nonsense, and it can’t be that ; because, if everything’s nonsense, then there can’t be any more nonsense, but harmony again . . . the harmony of general universal nonsense ! Consequently everything is connected, everything is dependent on something else, and even my so-called free soul, my will, the innermost grooves of my thought, are all links in an inseparable chain. A sound here must re-echo at the opposite end of time and space, as each link pulls the whole chain after it from both ends ! That is to say, when I curse, my curse simply results from the collective causality of the universe, when I bless—it is the same. . . . And if I blow my brains out, the indivisible chain compels me to do so, otherwise I couldn’t do it, being myself and where I am. At first this drove me to despair, for therewith I was transformed not only into God’s slave, but into a supernatural machine ! But then I had another curious idea, which consoled me : very good, so be it, no longer a speck of dust, no longer a hurricane, but instead one and all . . . myself and the universe, myself and God, myself and eternity, all are the same and all connected one with the other. For if I am only a link in the chain, that means that Nature or God, or whatever it is, could not do otherwise than create me thus ! If I am necessary it means that, just as I cannot do without the universe, so it cannot do without me. Everything is equal : grain of sand and a hurricane ; and the

law of the universe is like my expectoration, for if I can't help spitting, then it must be absolutely essential to the universe that I should do so. . . . Funny idea . . . isn't it ? " Naumoff asked with undisguised mockery.

" Yes, even if you are joking, it's interesting," said Krause superciliously.

Naumoff laughed.

" No, it's rubbish ! That's just the dreadful part, that it is rubbish, and that one must recognise such nonsense. What is that now—human logic cannot refuse to acknowledge this evident trash ? . . . But then logic and intellect are also—rubbish ? "

" Yes," said the cornet.

Naumoff stopped and gazed silently at the flame of the candle.

" You're a very strange fellow, Krause ! " he said suddenly in an utterly changed tone.

Krause moved a little and frowned.

" I don't understand you. You are thinking about something special, but you never speak out your mind ! . . . I think you are very unhappy, Krause. . . . Only I don't understand why. To judge by outward appearances you are quite serene, not to say indifferent."

" I have a large brain and a small heart," said Cornet Krause suddenly.

" What ? " asked Naumoff, surprised.

" A large brain and a small heart," reiterated the cornet calmly and with dignity, as though he were only complying with Naumoff's desire to hear this remarkable phrase again. " I have thought it all out, just as you have . . . only I don't care to talk much about it. You talk too much, in my opinion ! I am not a man of many words. Once I hated everything too, but now I am utterly indifferent. Let things be as they are. Nonsense ? . . . So be it. Sense and beauty ? . . . Very well, then. Let everything be as it is—it's all one to me ! Once I used to suffer under many things, but now I am resolved to kill all my feelings and to remain calm in face of everything. That was hard at first, and everything excited me . . . but gradually I became indifferent. My brain began to grow, my heart to shrink. And now I have a large brain and no heart. I feel

nothing. . . . I thought it would be better like this, but I see that after all it's immaterial. . . . I merely grew empty, or still worse : I died—and yet I live."

Naumoff watched him with interested, almost greedy eyes.

"And you really will shoot yourself one day, Krause ? " he asked suddenly with rapacious curiosity.

"Very possibly," replied the cornet indifferently. Probably, however, he had been unpleasantly affected by Naumoff's glances. He became very restless, crossed his legs and looked straight at Naumoff's face. For a minute he only raised his eyebrows in silence, then an unexpectedly crafty and scornful expression stole into his cold, arrogant face.

"Do you know," he began, speaking slowly and haltingly, "your whole theory is nonsense . . . and you don't believe in it either, but you are simply possessed of immense ambition and are willing to destroy the world, simply because no one ever dared to think of such a thing except yourself ! "

A convulsive movement crossed Naumoff's face, but Krause continued as calmly as before :

"You like to say things, and to think that you dare what no one else does. . . . But those are only words ! "

"You think so ? " asked Naumoff with malignant irony.

"I am sure of it . . . only words ! And if it were possible for you to execute your purpose, you would shrink from it and renounce your theory."

"Do you think so ? " repeated Naumoff, closing his eyes.

"Yes. Supposing I were to ask you whether I ought to shoot myself. Here before your eyes."

Naumoff frowned. He thought Krause was making fun of him ; he was furious.

"It is true that I have been contemplating suicide for a long time," continued Krause dispassionately, "and now I ask you : is it really the best thing to shoot oneself ? . . . Can you tell me that to my face ? . . . At once ! "

"I can ! " answered Naumoff malevolently. "It would be most effective ! "

"Yes ? Good . . ." said the cornet. "At once . . . ? "

Slowly and calmly he thrust his hand into the pocket of his riding breeches and drew out a black revolver.

Naumoff smiled disconcertedly, but did not move. He did not believe for a moment that Krause was in earnest, and felt the absurdity of his position.

"Child's play, cornet!" he said with assumed calm.

Krause paled suddenly and clenched his teeth with such violence that his cheek bones stood out in two sharp angles. All at once a genuine cold fury gleamed in his tranquil, colourless eyes.

"I never joke!" he hissed through his teeth, fixing as he did so a look so cutting and so full of hate upon Naumoff that the latter thought the cornet had gone mad.

And all at once he realised that the cornet was not joking. A cold shudder passed over him, but he forced himself to remain outwardly calm and immovable.

"Well, then, shoot yourself, if it gives you any pleasure!" he said defiantly.

Krause looked at him for another minute with the same fearful, incomprehensible rage. Thus they gazed into each other's eyes, and the united power of their glances was such that both trembled.

Then Krause's eyes grew suddenly dim, his eyebrows drooped, he let fall his convulsively raised hand with the revolver in it, stood up and turned to the wall.

Naumoff, still pale and trembling, closely observed every one of his movements. Then he laughed spitefully.

"That's better!" he said. "You put your revolver away and be off to bed . . . it's late! Yes . . . lots of things are more easily said than done!"

Krause made no reply; he still stood with his face to the wall.

Naumoff waited a minute with maliciously curling lips, but when he saw that Krause was taking no notice of him, he shrugged his shoulders and began to put on his things.

"It's time to go home," he said. "Good-bye."

Naumoff went to the door and opened it, but he paused on the threshold, turned round once again and said slowly, emphasizing every word with odious distinctness:

"Do you know, you may be right as far as I am concerned, but you are certain to shoot yourself. You will shoot your-

self. Do you hear ? Sooner or later, you will shoot yourself . . . you've got that kind of face ! Till we meet again. . . . Good night ! ”

Krause moved but did not answer.

And, laughing triumphantly, Naumoff shut the door behind him.

Then came the sound of the orderly preceding him to the steps. A breath of fresh air entered the room. The candles burned up more brightly, quivered and settled down again into yellow leaping tongues.

CHAPTER XLI

THE same black, restless, blustering night received Naumoff as he went out on to the steps.

The wind raged and dashed invisible rain-drops into his face. He groped his way down the steps, and walked quickly into the darkness, in which he could distinguish nothing but the vague outlines of the trees, their crests swaying wildly to and fro.

He could still see the long white face with the slanting, contracted brows. "Idiot!" he thought with unreasonable hatred.

His feet stepped mechanically into the mud, the wind rushed down upon him from all sides, but he noticed nothing. He was convinced now that even at the last moment Krause had not known whether he was joking or not. A human life had hung by a thread. A word, a movement—if, for instance, Naumoff had taken the suicide seriously and rushed upon him to snatch away the revolver—would have snapped the thread and Krause would have pulled the trigger. It was also clear to Naumoff, irrefutably clear, that Krause would shoot himself later on, perhaps that very night.

"That man positively bears the seal of death. . . . A born suicide. . . . A large brain and a small heart! . . . Possibly a small brain and too large a heart," thought Naumoff, sneering to himself.

He noticed that he could only think of Krause with vindictive hatred, and longed that he might really shoot himself that night. Naumoff knew too well that Krause had raised the edge of the curtain that concealed his own true soul, which he dared not lift himself. Yes, it was so. There were two men within him: one believed in his theory with a fanatic's obstinacy, desiring annihilation and death; the other feared them, choked with detestation and vented his own cowardice and despair on every one else.

And all that Naumoff really wanted was a cheap triumph

for his arguments and his strength. If he could, he would have pressed the pistol into the cornet's hand, the first sacrifice of his frenzied self-love.

At the thought that he was the cause of Krause's death, his breast would swell triumphantly. He saw all human beings before him—the millions of unhappy ignorant creatures, who as yet have no idea who lives among them and goes about here in the darkness, unknown but terrible. Naumoff imagined himself growing taller and taller, hovering over the sleeping earth like a black gigantic shadow.

From remote heights he seemed to look down on the nocturnal gloom, swarming with human beings: transcendent intellects which contemplate and create, beautiful women who give themselves to men in the rapture of conceiving new life, millions of hard hands working for the welfare of future generations. . . . So the wheel of human life turns round, smeared with blood, creaking and groaning and embracing the whole earth at one revolution. Life seethes and will always seethe . . . but in him, Naumoff, there is one who walks in darkness, who alone has rebelled against life. He carries the great idea within himself, and it will never die, can never die. . . . And even if people look upon him now as an anomaly, a megalomaniac, if they deride him and reject him, they must bear him on into the future, where he will one day awaken, terrible in size and form, like the pale horse of the Apocalypse. In the mist of the years to come, beyond which the livid sea of rapt thoughts of blood and tears was vaguely defined, there rose, like the symbol of the hurricane, the colossal image of the mighty prophet, who had suffered in fruitless strife, who had brought deliverance . . . and that was himself, Naumoff. . . .

When he got home to his room, which was wretched enough, although it belonged to the best hotel in the town, where the oil-lamp burnt in the hazy passage and the hall-porter slept, Naumoff struck a light, sat down at the table and began to write.

CHAPTER XLII

KRAUSE stood motionless till the door closed behind Naumoff, and only when the orderly tramped into the room with his heavy boots did he turn slowly round. The cornet's tall figure moved unfamiliar'y about the room, as though he were a stranger and had only come in by stealth during the owner's absence.

He moved something, changed the position of something else, glided inaudibly to and fro, accompanied by his black shadow on the walls, the shadow that watched him and copied his every movement. Nobody in the world was thinking of him at that minute, but he remembered every one and everything.

He saw clearly that his heart was really quite small and his brain enormously large. So large that it filled the whole room, pressing on his heart, on the walls, on the ceiling, extinguishing the candles, crossing even the boundaries of the room ; and this one gigantic head stood on the earth's empty, black surface, in the dark night, bearing within it a lighted torch. It stood there and looked round.

Slowly its ghastly, dead, all-seeing eyes turn and everything they look at dies and crumbles into dust. It alone exists in the world—the colossal head of Cornet Krause ; there is nothing else. He will close his eyes and everything will disappear.

This vision lasted two or three minutes, while Krause stood still in the room. Then he moved about again gently.

The rain began to lash more loudly against the windows. The cornet took out his violoncello, placed a chair in the middle of the room, sat down and began to play.

The strains of the violoncello were sustained and weird, and the tone solemn. The orderly woke up in the kitchen and thought his Honour was up to strange tricks again. The rain fell and fell, and there was something in its incessant rush that transcended everything and seemed to have no

end, like the sombre cadences of the violoncello. The music sang, the rain murmured. Two voices, blended in one long-drawn plaintive melody.

The violoncello paused. At the same moment Krause got up and put it carefully away in the corner. Then he put out the candles on the table and lit one in his bedroom near the bed. The black shadow crept out of the dark room after him and sat down behind his back on the bed. Krause began to undress.

Drawing off his boots, he sat still for a few minutes and looked into the flame of the candle. It was burning evenly and brightly, but suddenly it began to flicker, and to merge into a sparkling, orange-coloured circle. . . . Slowly Krause turned his eyes towards his long grey coat which hung on a nail in the corner. It was hanging motionless, empty and grey. But hardly had Krause concentrated his gaze upon it, than the long grey thing began to move, to contract and expand. . . . Krause turned round and lay down. For a minute he lay there motionless, only frowning as though in uncertainty. Then he put out the light.

The pattering of the rain was doubly audible in the darkness, as though it had come nearer to the window. Timorous shadows ran through the room. dead shadows busy and occupied, colliding with and avoiding one another, bending over the cornet and retiring again. And in the three corners that Krause could see stood black quiescent shadows, reaching to the ceiling.

Gradually well-known faces detach themselves from the surrounding gloom; Cornet Krause regards them coldly, dispassionately and pitilessly.

And so the phantoms glide past of those whom he has hated and loved . . . but he no longer feels hatred or love for them. There is the girl whom he once loved more than all the world, for whose love his soul had been ground to dust . . . he was waiting for her in the garden, in every fold of her dress he saw purity and beauty, he was moved to tears by every movement of her body and her soul. But she had died, and his love vanished without a trace: it did not create a new sun, or illuminate the world, it did not even live . . . ! The only trace of it left in his heart was a little sensitive stab. What's the good of love, then. . . . Love

should be rapture and ecstasy—but that cannot be evoked by a little irritating wound in the human heart.

There had been people whom Krause hated, but they were lost to sight and his hatred faded . . . why hate and suffer, when it is enough to forget ?

There are no sorrows, everything is useless. It is futile to begin a new day, to dress, to eat and drink, to speak, to think. Not that he was tired of it all . . . no, it is merely that it is so pointless.

No one knows that Krause is holding a pistol. . . . He cannot even see it himself in the darkness. . . . Something cold touches his temple. He imagines the black muzzle . . . feels how the tender skin on his temple wrinkles under the pressure of the steel. One more movement, one more . . .

A dark shadow, like a gigantic hand, flits through the darkness at incredible speed and bends over Cornet Krause. . . . The huge hooked fingers are raised in expectancy. . . . Little Krause, the tiny pistol in his hand, presses the muzzle a little more firmly against his temple, and above him is the tremendous hand with the black fingers, curved in deathly lust, which clutch the whole world. . . . In a second he will vanish, drift away into this void, this darkness. . . . That is he . . . Death ! . . .

"Oh—oh !" Cornet Krause gave a wild, piercing shriek.

The orderly rushed in from the kitchen, stamping heavily in his boots, carrying a candle, whose yellow light dispersed the formless shadows.

"Your Honour ! "

Cornet Krause was standing in the middle of the room in his nightshirt, his face distorted in a frenzy, his eyes darting out of their sockets, his slanting eyebrows sharply contracted, looking into the orderly's petrified face.

"Your Honour ! . . . Oh, your Hon . . ."

The cornet was silent, staring wrathfully into his servant's eyes. He still held the revolver in his hand which shook convulsively. For a minute they looked at one another. Suddenly the orderly could stand it no longer ; he turned round and rushed away.

He thought his master was chasing him. He was seized by a wild, undefinable dread ; it was no longer Krause

who had stared at him, but some stranger, some ogre. . . .
The Devil. . . .

He knocked against the table in the study, leant against it, still holding the candle, and began to cry out loudly : "Oh, Father ! What shall I do. . . . Help ! . . . "

The cornet's figure appeared at the bedroom door. He looked coldly at the orderly and his eyebrows twitched irresolutely.

" Bring me my clothes," he said quietly.

It was beginning to dawn in the courtyard. The autumn morning peered in through the chinks of the shutters.

CHAPTER XLIII

ALTHOUGH the rain had ceased, a cold steamy moisture came down from the distant white clouds. One felt that it would begin to pour again in a minute, covering the fields with a grey wavering veil, and would continue to rain the whole day and all through the long dark night.

In the middle of the vast grey plain the soldiers had diverged in an unequal chain. The targets shimmered like tiny circles in the far distance and sharp yellow fire rattled briskly from one end of the chain to the other. The shots crackled drily in jerks and the bullets dashed against the distant targets with short singing whistles. Now and then the signal sounded from the copper trumpet, and then tiny signallers appeared on the rampart waving little red flags, marking the number of good shots.

Cornet Krause strode across the damp field, against which his tall silver-grey figure stood out sharply. The cold autumn wind caught the skirts of his overcoat and whistled in his ears. He looked intently at the ground and moved his eyebrows meditatively, as though he had to search for something which he could not find. It was the past night that occupied the cornet's mind.

It was dreadful that the decision to which one could apparently oppose no more arguments, which one had followed to the furthest limits, should shrink helplessly from the last step. That hundredth part of a second was not to be vanquished that must elapse between the pressure of the trigger and the end. The instinctive dread proved stronger than the conscious will, and before it everything collapsed like a house of cards.

It pointed to some flaw in his logical conclusions. It must mean that his life was precious to him . . . this empty, unessential life was, in spite of its proved absurdity, dearer to him than his inmost self, which clung grovelling to the life that had cursed it. But it could not be only cowardice . . . after all, the firm belief in the necessity of

death was not in him. Yes, he would have to think it all over again from the outset, to solve this trivial and yet so important point which had till then eluded him.

Krause with his long legs took giant strides across the field towards a small mound of clay, on which the blackened site of a charred wood fire was visible. The half-burnt stalks of the dry grass of the Steppes still lay in a regular circle. He looked closely and earnestly at this spot, mechanically raked the remaining bits of fuel together with the toe of his boot, prepared a small pile of wood and set light to it.

The dry paper flamed up gaily, the wisps of straw began to crackle and smoke. For a minute the fire seemed to be on the point of extinction, but gradually the lower flames curled up and soon burned brightly and vigorously.

Krause stood, his feet wide apart, watching it attentively. The fire winds its way cunningly through everything—the charred twigs writhe. Shall the fire engulf them or shall it not? Shall it, because that is its life? Whence has it come? The twigs are doomed. They will burn, but then the fire will die too. Why is it in such a hurry? It cannot help it: that is the law of its being. It lives and is cruel and cares for nothing. Give it food and it will develop into the terrible flame which annihilates everything and can consume the entire globe. . . . Yes, it can burn it, but it will never triumph, for in the last moment, when the last chip burns out, the fire will be quenched. It will die a conqueror. One cannot live without the other, they cannot be separated. Nothing can sever life from death. Death conquers and vanishes in the victory, and the dread of death exists only as long as life lasts!

Krause smiled coldly and stepped aside.

And that is all; as soon as this dread is effaced, there is no more death. This terror must be, it can never be non-existent, but therefore it must be overcome, out-witted.

Very well then, not in darkness where terror lurks, where it is unassailable—so one must be fortified by people, faces, noise, and excitement. People had been nothing to him in life, now they should help him to die.

"Just so!" said Krause to himself.

There was a thud of hoofs on the damp ground; Trenieff rode up on a large bay mare. The shooting was over, the

squadron, in rank and file again, was slowly turning down the road to the town.

"Come home, Krause!" Trenieff shouted from a distance, looking in surprise at the cornet and the bonfire. "What are you doing here?"

He had observed the cornet rather closely of late, on account of his extraordinary behaviour. And that morning Krause's orderly had come to him with a confused tale of what had happened in the night. He could not rid himself of the thought that Krause was in a fair way to losing his reason.

"What are you doing here?" he repeated, halting near the cornet, and cautiously making a sign to the orderly to bring Krause's horse.

"Nothing," answered Krause, "there, the bonfire. . . ."

"What's it doing there?"

"Oh . . ." Krause shrugged his shoulders irresolutely.

Trenieff shook his head.

"Listen, I've been meaning to tell you for some time. . . . You don't look well. You'd better take leave and go away somewhere for a change. . . . If you don't mind, I'll speak to Daviditch about it."

Krause listened attentively and nodded his head very earnestly and gravely. Then he suddenly stood at attention, raised his hand to his cap in salute, walked towards his horse, sprang into the saddle, and trotted after the squadron to catch it up.

Trenieff rode after him, more absorbed than ever.

"I shall have to tell Daviditch about it!"

He was thinking of the commander.

Krause's pace increased to a gallop while he smiled coldly and exultantly. Now he understood everything, he had found what he needed.

CHAPTER XLIV

As Trenieff dismounted at the steps of his house, he looked uneasily at the windows. He never knew, when he came home, in what sort of mood he would find his wife, and in anticipation he feared her cold, ill-tempered face, her clear eyes hardly concealing her feminine spite. Only when he was convinced that she was serene and friendly did he become unaffectedly cheerful. And he realised that he was like a dog which sheepishly approaches its master with its tail between its legs, to assure itself that it is not going to be beaten, and then begins to jump up and whine in an ecstasy of joy and devotion. And because of this humiliating state of affairs he hated his wife more at such moments than during their worst quarrels.

But the longing for her caresses was so much a part of him that he could no longer live without them. They were as indispensable to him as the air ; his soul found life and energy only in their warmth.

And she, observing his questioning glance, felt how he feared her, and because she was hurt that he should think her tyrannical, she despised him for it. Thus there were constantly strained and unnatural relations in their marriage and strife without end. And in proportion as their love became deeper and stronger, and the physical and spiritual union between them closer, the more heavily did it weigh upon him.

"Where is my wife ?" Trenieff asked the orderly who took his cap and coat.

"Still busy in the house," soothingly answered the cunning Little Russian, who knew very well what went on, and pitied his master sincerely.

Trenieff was ashamed that the soldier should try to allay his fears, but he breathed more freely and went light-heartedly into the rooms, his spurs clanking.

The evening before they had quarrelled unexpectedly in

the middle of an unimportant conversation, for they differed even in trifles if only to distress one another.

Then the usual scene of reconciliation had taken place, late at night. Every quarrel ended in the same way, after they had martyred and tortured one another till they were utterly exhausted. They must be reconciled, and that humiliated him. However cruelly and spitefully they might have insulted one another, they were compelled to make peace at last, for otherwise they would not have been able to sleep together. And that would have been an open breach, a separation, the bare idea of which froze both their hearts.

It was Trenieff who had apologized ; he cared for her more than she for him, and because of that he suffered more and was the more ready to yield. But as she knew her power, she succeeded in irritating him to the utmost and vented her bitterness on him obstinately.

Trenieff had approached his wife several times, but she had repulsed him, burying her tear-stained face in the pillows and reiterating stubbornly :

“Leave me alone ! . . . Go away ! . . . What do you want with me ! . . .”

Trenieff, in his shirt and riding-breeches, walked up and down the room, clenching his fists, and feeling that he must go mad. His face was swollen, his moustache drooped lankly, so that he looked unattractive and miserable enough. Sometimes he was seized by a paroxysm of fury, and then he was obliged to restrain himself by main force from striking his wife with all his strength every time he approached her. He clutched his head and stepped aside groaning.

“It can’t go on like this ! What is the good of it ? Rather death ! Rather separation ! ”

“Oh, certainly, that’s just what I should prefer. If you weren’t so soft you would have gone away long ago and left me in peace ! ” she answered contemptuously.

She always said exactly the same thing, and these words infuriated him anew. But at the same time he could not suppress his violent jealousy ; she spoke so placidly of their separation, whereas he scarcely dared to think of it. And then he imagined that she was already among strangers,

that she had forgotten him, that another enjoyed the love and caresses that had once been his. The most repulsive pictures flashed through his mind ; he saw every movement of her body in another's arms . . . he could have killed her in those moments.

For some minutes he succumbed to a strange feeling of lassitude. Everything was indifferent to him, and in this state of exhaustion he even began to trifle with the thought that she might die. . . . And suddenly he saw her dead body before him, the beautiful warm body that he knew and loved so well.

How dreadful would be the realization then that they had lost so many days and nights through these senseless quarrels. They could never make amends ! What were they doing . . . life passes, it only comes once and they were spoiling it.

" Is it possible that she has never thought about it ? Doesn't it depress her too ? She must understand that much," thought Trenieff, his shoulders twitching convulsively.

He longed to speak sincerely to her without delay, explaining everything, but he was afraid that she would rebuff him and tear herself away from him. However, he came nearer and nearer, and finally knelt down by the side of the bed and cautiously pressed his lips against her cool, soft skin.

And at that moment he knew that the quarrel was over and that she herself was wearily seeking reconciliation. How well they knew one another. Just because her bare shoulders had quivered and she had not answered him Trenieff felt her readiness to surrender.

She loved him, would submit to anything, only her self-will had restrained her ; and this very obstinacy that had reduced him to despair a minute before suddenly seemed touching and delightful ; it amused him. His eyes were burning as he covered her shoulders with kisses and said very tenderly :

" Now, it's over . . . forgive me . . . old fool that I am."

He did not know himself why just that word should have occurred to him. But suddenly two bare soft arms

were flung round his neck. He kissed her burning lips with wild passion and repeated, as though pleased with his successful pleasantry :

“ Forgive an old fool.”

“ Silly boy ! . . . What are you saying ? ” she whispered, and they were reconciled with tears of remorse and rapturous words of endearment.

In the night, as they lay close to one another tired and happy and stared into the darkness, she told him in a whisper what remorse was caused by her perception that she was ruining his life, how terribly her conscience tormented her at night, how ardently she loved him.

“ I am mad, forgive me,” she said.

And again she repeated, as she had done a hundred times, that things must change.

“ How often you have promised ! ” escaped Trenieff.

They embraced one another convulsively, almost despairingly ; but they no longer believed in each other. And yet they both longed passionately to believe.

“ And how happy we should be ! ” said Trenieff, responding tenderly and sadly to her caresses.

When Trenieff got up in the morning, and dressed softly that he might not wake his wife, he looked at her and thought how sweet and dear everything was about her that had so distressed him ! He would have liked to wake her and take her in his arms, flushed with sleep, just as she was, and to kiss her hands and feet and breast without ceasing. But as he could not do that, he went out gently, smiling with wet eyes.

At the midday meal he told his wife about Krause, about a trifling dispute with a non-commissioned officer and that a soldier in the sixth squadron had been fatally wounded by a stallion.

They often disagreed out of boredom—he knew that—and so he took pains to amuse her by telling his news as animatedly as he could. They attached importance to every trifle, because their long married life, which had exhausted the depths of their souls, had left them so few subjects of conversation. She, too, did her best to show how much it all interested her, and now and again, as though to thank him for this distraction, she stretched her bare arm across

the table and stroked his hand, looking at him radiantly. Then Trenieff stooped and tenderly kissed her soft, fragrant hand, almost sorry that her caresses should make him so happy.

Then he began to discuss the news of the town.

She often felt that she was a burden to him, that he was tired of her and wanted other women ; so involuntarily she constantly led up to that subject. She hated them all as possible rivals, had not a good word to say for any one, and repeated every bit of gossip with jealous spite. That always annoyed Trenieff ; he began to oppose her, kindly at first, for fear of evoking fresh strife ; then, if she pretended that the whole affair was a matter of indifference to her, he became more resolute and allowed himself to be carried away, blaming her for injustice. Her eyes darkened suddenly, she bit her lips, restrained herself for a moment, wishing as she did from the bottom of her heart not to begin quarrelling again, but in spite of this a fresh dispute arose. When Trenieff at last observed her malignant glances, the disagreement was already well on its way and increased with every word, so that nothing could suppress it.

But this time Trenieff listened quietly. He even forced himself to smile and to agree with her.

She was talking spitefully and venomously about Lisa Tregulova and Genitchka, who had gone away with Dchenieff.

" Well, I can understand an actress, a dissolute woman like that ; but I think that girl's disgraceful. . . . I don't understand how people can pity her. A wicked, fast girl ! And she's only seventeen, or eighteen at the outside ! "

Trenieff nodded his head, although he was very sorry for Lisa and liked Genitchka, who had not seemed to be a dissolute woman at all.

" They say she is *enceinte*," he observed to please his wife, blushing.

After the meal they went for a walk in the garden, where the leaves were already turning yellow ; there was a look of space and brightness about everything. Their little girl scampered along the damp paths where the puddles glistened; they went on chatting about various trifles. They were good-tempered, serene, and cheerful.

But by the evening all subjects of conversation were

exhausted, everything the one began the other already knew, and as usual they were both bored. He wished some one would come, but took pains not to show it, and feigned cheerfulness and content. When he noticed that his wife wanted him to go to the club, he replied with an assumed expression of indifference :

“ What shall I do when I get there ? I am sick of it . . . always the same thing ! I don’t want to go.”

His wife, who knew how much he enjoyed going there and who did not wish to be the one to deprive him of this pleasure, persuaded him with kisses to go.

This went on for some time : she tried to persuade him, though she abhorred drinking and gambling ; he assured her that he did not want to go, feeling all the time an a most morbid desire to do so. And so they sat and lied to one another, and just as the old irritability was on the verge of reviving, Arbusoff drove up.

Trenieff jumped up and went joyfully to meet him.

Arbusoff, broad and bull-necked, in a dark blue caftan and patent-leather top-boots, strode into the room. He was obviously drunk, but his gait was firm and even elastic. Only his sombre eyes were blood-shot, and his voice unnaturally loud and cheerful.

“ Good evening ! I’ve come to fetch you ! You’ll come to the club, won’t you ? We shall all be there . . . Serge Michailov Dchenieff has arrived . . . that’s settled then ? ”

Trenieff looked anxiously at his wife. Arbusoff, who intercepted the glance, smiled impudently but did not speak, causing Trenieff to redden with shame.

“ I don’t really care to,” he drawled.

“ What—you don’t care to ? Let’s start, off we go ! ”

“ No, really. . . . ”

“ Nonsense . . . let’s be off ! ” Arbusoff became importunate with a drunken obstinacy and seized Trenieff’s arm. “ Don’t be a wet blanket ! I’m going to play them a trick ! We’ll startle the whole lot. . . . Come, let’s be off ! ”

And either by chance or design, he added : “ Your wife will let you go, we’ll ask her very nicely. . . . She’s so kind ! ”

“ I’m not keeping him ! ” Mme. Trenieff interposed.

Trenieff flushed.

"What's my wife got to do with it? It's quite simple, I don't want to go. What a queer fellow you are! . . . Can't make it out!"

Arbusoff looked him straight in the face with brazen, unconcealed mockery.

"That's all humbug, you're afraid of your wife!" he cried, laughing loudly.

"Why don't you go?" his wife interposed again, with assumed indifference. "Do go!"

Trenieff looked quickly at her.

"Certainly, go," she nodded encouragingly.

Trenieff tried to read the expression of her eyes, but their cold transparency was unfathomable.

"Yes, yes, certainly, we could go . . . only . . ." he said hesitatingly.

"Well then, let's start!" cried Arbusoff. "Quick! Put your things on, and I'll wait!"

Trenieff went out, still irresolute, to get ready.

Arbusoff stayed in the dining-room, and Trenieff could hear his blustering voice and his wife's soft, constrained replies. He guessed by this constraint that she was depressed, and he became uneasy. But the longing to get away from home was so intense that he finished his preparations.

As they were starting, he let Arbusoff go on ahead, so that he might kiss his wife. He looked into her eyes in embarrassment. Was she angry? She forced herself to smile, but he noticed her disinclination and this provoked him again. "My God, is it such a crime to go to the club?" he thought.

"Perhaps you'd rather I didn't go?" he said, wavering.

"Oh, why?" she answered. "You want to, don't you?"

"But won't you be dull alone?"

It was her turn to feel annoyance: of course she would be dull, and of course he ought to stay at home, and without asking. What was the good of such nonsense?

"No, I shall read and then go to bed. . . . You go!"

"Perhaps I'll stay here after all," he drawled.

"Oh, for goodness' sake, go!" she almost shouted, but

instead she added with a smile : " Do go, and enjoy yourself ! "

Trenieff made up his mind at last, but his pleasure was spoilt. In the doorway he looked back again like an animal that has accustomed itself to captivity. At that moment he really did not want to go. He was sorry for his wife, left all alone, and he dreaded the imminent quarrel. But Arbusoff was waiting, it would have been awkward to refuse, and so Trenieff drove away.

CHAPTER XLV

THE grey, dreary garden melted away in the damp mist beyond the huge studio-window. In the faint twilight the melancholy of autumn dissolved, and strayed pale and sick through the room.

Michailov Nicolaievitch Dchenieff, who had only arrived from the station that morning and had slept all day, woke up towards evening with a heavy head and a mysterious weight on his soul. Although he had been in the large town the day before, already the foggy streets and the long rows of cabs, the cold electric light and the many well-known faces seemed to have faded into the far distance.

At the same time his own studio looked cold and unfamiliar. He had left it in bright sunshine, the leaves in the garden delicately tinted with the first gold of autumn ; now the garden was drenched, withered leaves were strewn about the paths which were deep in mud after the rain, and in the frozen twilight of the studio the fragile cobwebs of dust covered everything. It made the room seem uncomfortable, as though he were in some strange, empty house. The studies and pictures on the walls looked uninteresting, and the stuffed owl opened wide his yellow glass eyes, as though he did not recognize his master.

Dchenieff walked about the studio, uncertain what to do, indolently following the melancholy train of his thoughts. Everything failed, everything seemed to turn out badly, as though there were an incorrigible mistake somewhere.

"What did make me come back here ?" he asked himself again and again.

He did not know himself how to account for the idea. An inexplicable depression, a profound hatred of himself and everyone else had driven him away.

About two days before his departure he had seen Genitchka off at the station. After a month in Moscow, she^{was} going to some place in Siberia. He retained a vivid recollection of the parting.

Genitchka was stepping into the dimly-lit compartment, looking at him with eyes that shone through the twilight. There was a soft, deeply-hidden sadness in the bright, audacious eyes.

He was astonished at feeling nothing but weariness when he looked at her slender figure and her vivid, beautiful face. He almost wished the train would start with all possible speed.

Really, she had never told him that she loved him. Now, when he asked her, she only laughed enigmatically.

"Oho! As if that weren't all the same to you, Serge Nicolaievitch."

Although he knew that it was a matter of indifference to him, yet it affected him unpleasantly that she should not tell him she loved him.

"So you're really going?" he said quickly.

"Yes, I am," answered Eugenia Samoilovna. "Now, what's the use . . . Good-bye! Think kindly of me. We shall certainly never meet again."

"Why?" He only asked because he felt the awkwardness of emphasizing the fact that this was a final parting, that they were really strangers already.

Eugenia Samoilovna looked into his eyes as though hoping to find something, and she laughed while her rosy lips were tremulous.

"Oh, Serge Nicolaievitch! . . . Why should we meet again? After this it would only be irksome. Wouldn't it now?"

Michailov shrugged his shoulders.

"Whereas now we shall remember one another as a happy dream," she continued in her ringing voice. "And as for you? There'll be another woman . . . or, to be correct, many others!"

A vague row of these "other" unknown women passed before Michailov's eyes. A sensation of boredom overcame him; will there really be as many more as there have been, and will they also vanish in the midst of life, like an idle dream? Why? Only to forget their faces again, as the earlier ones had been forgotten . . . only for that?

And all at once he wished that she were not going away! She might not be very clever, she might be shallow, but

she was dear to him, and there was a close bond between them. Why should they sever that and seek another? Whatever her reasons for the attachment, she had given him many happy hours, had been his companion in pleasure, exacting nothing and binding neither herself nor him. A feeling of affectionate, physical gratitude filled his soul. He took Genitchka's hand gently and softly kissed the smooth, cool skin just above her glove. She looked down at him and in her eyes there was a look of pain which Dchenieff did not notice.

"Oh yes, we shall," he said, and broke off again at once as though in alarm.

Genitchka looked at him expectantly.

"Well, perhaps . . ." she said provocatively.

People were constantly passing up and down by the door of the compartment and disturbing their conversation. They were continually asked to step aside and make way for passengers and porters with their bulky bags and boxes. Genitchka was jostled and thrust against the wall, but she did not go away. So there was nothing left for them but to look at each other in silence, and this rendered the parting still more awkward and oppressive.

The second bell rang.

In a minute they must part, never to meet again. She will be in some little hole in the provinces, where they will applaud her and give her flowers and diamonds, where some one else, whom he cannot even imagine, will be near her with kisses and embraces, as he has been now. And he will drive back alone in a damp cab through the muddy streets of Moscow, filled with preoccupied strangers.

Again he took Genitchka's hand and kissed it. At that moment there was nobody so dear to him as she was.

"I am sorry you're going away," he said awkwardly, not knowing whether it was the truth or a lie. He thought himself how remarkable it was that a feeling could be so divided.

"Really?" asked Eugenia Samoilovna, and again the warm, mysterious look came into her eyes.

"Of course . . . I did love you, indeed!" said Dchenieff, smiling himself at the inappropriate "indeed."

Genitchka shook her head.

"Yes, indeed I love you," he repeated insistently, as though he meant to adhere obstinately to that one word.

"No, you didn't," replied Genitchka, with equal conviction, a grave, wise look in her eyes; "there may have been moments when you thought you did, but you didn't really love me; you've never loved any woman!"

There was something in these words that thrilled Michailov's inmost soul. He looked at her admiringly, and with curious respect. She suddenly seemed transformed, immeasurably nobler and finer than the shallow, frivolous actress he had known. Could it be that she had never shown herself as she really was? What mysteries might be hidden in the depths of this remarkable personality, that had always seemed so simple.

"Why did you never speak like that before?" he said slowly.

It was strange; she knew at once what he was thinking. She answered with an embarrassed smile: "You didn't want anything of that kind, Serge Nicolaievitch! You . . . Well, it's all the same now."

She was silent for a minute. Then she smiled almost guiltily and went on in an altered voice, full of emotion and tenderness:

"But we women are happy, you know! We don't take things easily, like . . . but never mind that——" she interrupted herself hastily. "But tell me . . . we are parting, perhaps for ever . . . now we can speak openly. Tell me: are you happy—if only sometimes—with me, for instance, or with others . . . like myself?" she added, in a tone of bitter self-derision.

Michailov looked up.

"No, never," he replied, with deep sincerity.

She looked at him long and silently, dark shadows crossing her bright lovely face.

"Yea, I know," she said piercingly. "You are unhappy, Serge Nicolaievitch!"

The third bell rang harshly, the crowds streamed out of the carriages. Michailov scarcely had time to kiss her hand before she was torn away from him. Laughingly she inclined her slender figure to one side, to keep her place. Michailov, who had not distinctly caught the end

of the last sentence, tried to fix her with his eyes among the many faces. A fat officer clambered up the steps, calling out to a stout lady in a gigantic lilac-coloured hat :

“ Tell Papa I’ll be sure to come at Christmas, if only for two days. . . .”

Others were kissing, some one shouted :

“ Mind you write ! Love to all at home ! . . . Pleasant journey ! . . .”

The crowd pushed Michailov imperceptibly further and further away from the train. Already there was a barrier between himself and Genitchka, cold, unfamiliar, almost hostile. Her lips were still smiling, but her eyes were sad, and said what could no longer be expressed in words.

The train started cautiously, crawled away, and increased in speed suddenly.

Slowly her bright face and shining eyes vanished in the distance. Beside her was the round face of the fat officer who was still shouting to his corpulent lady.

“ Now, mind you tell Papa. . . . Don’t forget ! . . .”

Once more her face peeped out behind a platform-pillar, some one waved a white glove, but he could no longer distinguish whether it was hers or not. Then the tail-lamp of the train sped past, the walls of the station blotted out everything for ever. . . . The white smoke dispersed under the arches, the noise was muffled and finally died away.

“ She’s gone ! ”

Something snapped in Michailov’s soul. He felt lonely and superfluous in the midst of all the people among whom he went out from the station. And this feeling was intensified, almost morbidly overstrained, as he stepped out on to the great wet square, garish with electric light. The black cabs concealed the view ; beyond them the bells of the trams and the coachmen’s shouts sounded strange and unfamiliar.

Michailov took a cab and drove back to his hotel.

CHAPTER XLVI

THE next day Michailov Nicolaievitch Dchenieff went home.

He was morbidly ill at ease during the whole journey ; he did not know himself why he was going. One minute he lay down, the next he jumped up again ; now he went into the dining-car and now he sat looking for hours out of the window. Through the dimmed panes he saw the wet fields flying past, the villages and huts, like mouldering dung-heaps that seemed to spring from the soil, stunted copses, narrow rivers ; now and then crows flew up into the air, cawing at the train.

There was no change in this dreary grey landscape all day long. The rain poured down unceasingly ; everything—earth and sky and woods and villages and flying crows and the drenched grey peasants at the deserted wayside stations staring blankly after the train—seemed to overflow into a sordid lugubrious melancholy.

Michailov's brain was dulled and confused from his sleepless night, so that at times he thought of nothing more and felt nothing but a foreboding of something terrible and final.

Not till he had slept soundly all day at home did he feel that he was beginning to recover. He glanced cursorily round the dusty, cold studio, looked out of the windows at the soaking garden and asked himself in dismay : “ What made me come back ? . . . this is really the end.”

He felt more cheerful after lighting the lamp. He made a good tea, unpacked his things, and then decided to go to the club. He almost hoped he would meet some one there, and, not without pleasure he remembered old Dr. Arnoldi.

At that moment Lisa came.

She almost rushed in, drenched with the rain, breathless with excitement, a grey shawl wrapped round her hair which the moisture had loosened. She looked very guilty and embarrassed : as though alarmed by her own audacity

and uncertain of her reception ; but in spite of this her naive eyes shone with joy.

Michailov, standing in the middle of the studio, hat in hand, looked at her uncomprehendingly for some moments. The whole time he had been away he had not thought once of Lisa : she seemed to have been utterly obliterated from his life. Now she was suddenly with him again with her shy manner and her appealing glances, radiant with love.

She remained standing at the door as she had come in, smiling at once guiltily and joyfully.

Michailov saw her pleading, devoted eyes and he suddenly realised that the future would be anything but simple : that he would have to go through some terrible experiences.

" Oh, it's you," he said slowly at last and went towards her, without knowing at the moment what to say or do.

God knows what Lisa had read in his movement, but her face suddenly glowed with boundless rapture. She threw herself upon him, letting her grey shawl drop to the floor, and flung both arms round his neck.

For a minute they stood thus in the middle of the room. Michailov felt that she was trembling as her slight, warm figure in the wet cold blouse clung to him. Then he noticed that she had nothing but the blouse on in spite of the bad weather. It touched him. He lifted the little face she tried to hide and kissed her lips.

Lisa started.

For a moment she leant back, looking at him, then she pressed her lips still more passionately to his. Yet again she tore herself away, looked into his eyes once more, and then covered his whole face with kisses ; she did not seem to know what she was doing.

Suddenly she began to cry.

" But what . . . what's the matter, my poor little girl ? " asked Michailov in a trembling voice.

" I've suffered so terribly ! " murmured Lisa without ceasing to sob.

Michailov continued to stroke her hair in silence, but the momentary paroxysm of tenderness had passed and only a feeling of intense pity and a distressing sense of guilt remained. It struck even himself that he was stroking her hair with a kind of fatherly protection.

"How stupid I am," she said. "Dearest . . . dearest . . . my dearest." Such were the terms in which she thought of him day and night. And again she alternately kissed him and looked into his eyes, not knowing how to express the love she felt.

In time this began to embarrass Michailov; and it shamed him, too.

"My divinity!" cried Lisa passionately, and this one commonplace word offended his ear.

"Now that's enough. . . . What is the matter with you?" he said. "Sit down, why are we standing?"

But Lisa did not obey, as though she had not heard; she looked at him as before. She had forgotten all she had been through,—grief, jealousy, the gossip of the whole town, humiliation and despair; in her heart she cherished that infinite love for him in which all her sorrows vanished without a trace, and she believed that now everything would go right.

"How did you know I'd come back?" asked Michailov.

"Yes, you didn't write me a line . . . not one! . . . And I was so . . ." said Lisa instead of answering, a gentle reproach in her voice.

"I had a lot to do," Michailov explained awkwardly.

But Lisa, looking at him again with wide-open eyes in a frenzy of bliss, no longer heard him.

"Do let's sit down," repeated Michailov distractedly.

She started in alarm and went submissively to the divan. But she had scarcely sat down when she slid to the floor, knelt down and hugged him so violently that he had difficulty in breathing.

He thought this theatrical and absurd. He wondered how he could have had anything to do with this little provincial girl.

With a great effort he raised her, and made her sit beside him, kissing her to hold her securely and pressing her head back among the cushions. She trembled and moved passionately under his kisses and closed her eyes. At that moment he felt the woman in her for the first time. Till then she had remained chaste as a girl in her surrender to him, and he had awakened no voluptuous impulses. But now she suddenly began to tremble beneath his kisses, to move

restlessly ; she moaned softly, her cheeks were burning, her whole figure drooped unresistingly towards him.

This first intoxicating passion went to Michailov's head ; his eyes blazed, his delicate inflated nostrils quivered, everything was blurred in a mist. He took possession of her with passionate caresses. But very soon Michailov became cool and indifferent, as usual.

" Again ! " flashed through his mind ; he would have liked to send her away, light a cigarette, get up and go out.

" Now, sit down, Lisa . . . we must have a talk . . ." he said, raising her impatiently by the shoulders.

" I love you ! " answered Lisa.

Michailov paused helplessly.

" Well, talk, talk ! " she cried quickly, but she could not decide to look him in the face, because that new overpowering experience was still surging within her.

" Listen," began Michailov, " I've been wanting to tell you for some time. . . . It's useless for you to love me as you do."

" You are my divinity ! " repeated Lisa, with the same obstinate enthusiasm, as though this were an answer to anything he might have to say to her.

Michailov shrugged his shoulders.

" I won't do it again, I won't do it again." Lisa hastened to beg forgiveness like a little child, looking up into his eyes. " But why useless ? Aren't you splendid . . . my beloved ! "

A heavy burden oppressed Michailov. This love which saw and realised nothing almost deprived him of consciousness.

" You are so clever, so splendid . . . my divinity ! "

This word infuriated Michailov, it seemed so unbearably vulgar. " I must put an end to this," he thought.

" I am not in the least what you think, Lisa ! And the best thing you can do is to stop loving me, and as soon as possible ! "

Lisa turned pale. She saw an abyss before her.

" Can that be true ? " she replied.

She looked long at him with wide-open, lifeless eyes, and as he involuntarily averted his face she became still paler.

" You don't love me any more ? " she asked very slowly, as though she could not believe in such a possibility.

" I love nobody ! " he answered sullenly and awkwardly.

Both were silent. Lisa's lips quivered, as though she wanted to ask something which she could not bring herself to utter.

" Oh, Lisa ! " said Michailov bitterly, unable to endure her strange look any longer, " if you only knew how hard it is for me ! . . . "

" You love some one else ? " asked Lisa slowly and without animation. " And I ? . . . "

Apparently she could not realise the facts at all. To her it seemed so clear and simple that he could not but requite the love of one who had given herself to him and loved him more than her life.

" I've told you before that I don't love anybody ! " repeated Michailov, rising. " Listen, Lisa." He tried to remain calm. " I have lived with too many women, dissipated too much of myself to love as you do . . . I like you, simply as a woman; when you are with me, I can't help wishing to possess you, but I can't love you . . . I can't. . . . "

Lisa was silent and looked at him steadfastly.

" You want a man who can love you as you deserve to be loved. . . . You are so sweet and dainty and pretty . . . you ought to be loved with deep, true love . . . But that's impossible for me ! I have nothing left but sensuality ! . . . For me you are—only one of many. And would you like that, to be only one of many ? "

Lisa started and staggered back, as if he had struck her a blow in the face.

" Then it's true that you . . . have been living with that actress ? "

Michailov averted his eyes involuntarily.

" It's not my fault . . ." He tried to excuse himself instead of giving a plain answer; " I never told you I loved you."

" At the same time as with me ? " continued Lisa, without listening.

Michailov shrugged his shoulders.

Lisa rose slowly and looked around as though lost.

Michailov, who followed her movements mechanically, handed her the grey shawl, but at the same moment he started back, horrified at what he had done.

She clasped the shawl wildly and pressed it convulsively against her cheeks, still looking at him with those uncomprehending half-crazy eyes. Suddenly she put her hands to her head, moaned, and rushed out of the room.

"Lisa!" cried Michailov and took a few steps to follow her.

But she did not turn back. He looked through the open black doorway for a long time.

He felt a terrible self-loathing; it was as though all at once everything around him crumbled and crashed to pieces. In his soul was neither pity nor grief, only the indifference of overwhelming prostration.

CHAPTER XLVII

MICHAILOV was aroused by noise and uproar.

Several people ascended the steps, shouting and stamping, and after some moments vanished again, when Arbusoff's broad, energetic figure appeared in the black square of the door, in a red shirt and open caftan, with mud-bespattered top-boots, his cap jauntily pushed over his eyes.

"There he is!" cried Arbusoff loudly, stepping firmly into the room. "How are you, Serge? Are you alone? And we've found you out . . . come with us!"

"Where to?" asked Michailov absently.

They pushed into the room in a noisy group. Arbusoff, tall Cornet Krause in his long cavalry-coat, Naumoff, Trenieff with his curled moustache, fat Lieutenant Ivanoff, and behind them all, next to a young unknown officer, Ryskoff, looking intimidated and confused.

"To the club! Let us drink and be merry till death comes, till we die!" cried Arbusoff. "As for me, Serge, I've been drinking for about three weeks, I simply can't keep quiet! And it's like this: What else is there to do in the world? We can't all be artists and conquerors of hearts! Yes, all right for those lucky devils! By the way, what have you done with your actress?"

"You're everlastingly drunk!" Michailov smiled wrathfully. "Don't talk rubbish!"

"Rubbish? Right you are!" cried Arbusoff. "And the actress is—rubbish, and everything else—rubbish. Well now, say something, Serge, do!"

He was pale, great drops of perspiration stood on his forehead.

"Yes, yes," agreed Michailov awkwardly, to get away from him.

"And you've just come back from Moscow?" Tall, polite Krause suddenly intervened. "What sort of weather are they having there?"

Michailov looked at him in astonishment, with the impression that the cornet was drunk also. And when he looked more closely at the whole party, he observed that the others, too, with the exception of Naumoff, were not less intoxicated. Naumoff's appearance was distasteful to him, as though he reminded him of some trouble.

Arbusoff shouted and waved his hands. Krause was silent and frowned interestedly. Trenieff vigorously twirled his moustache and laughed loudly. Ryskoff, who had not yet accustomed himself to the society into which a caprice of Arbusoff's had introduced him, sheltered behind the backs of the others, not knowing in the very least what was expected of him.

It flashed through Michailov's mind that the best thing for him to do would be to get drunk like the rest, so that his consciousness might go to the devil. Lisa's face, in which the strange, transparent eyes glowed, was still before him.

"Well, what are we going to do then?" he asked.
"Shall we be off?"

"Bravo!" roared Arbusoff so loudly that the stuffed owl on the wall trembled. He suddenly turned his attention to it. After looking at it for a long time, his face darkened, and finally he made a gesture of disgust.

"Why do you keep that hideous object? I'll send you a bear instead."

"Where should I keep him?"

"A bear is nicer."

"Where would you get him from?"

"I have a bear."

"But your bear is a live one," remarked Lieutenant Ivanoff thoughtfully; "you can't keep a live bear in a room!"

Arbusoff looked at him in drunken astonishment, as though for the first time he realized that one could not keep a live bear in a room.

"That's fine. . . . He'd crush all the models! . . . But what nonsense. Then I'll have him killed and skinned, and give him to you!"

"It would be a shame to kill him; Mishka's a beauty!" laughed Trenieff.

Arbusoff looked at him furiously.

"A shame? Rot! it's not a shame for any one! I'll

kill him, and that's an end of it ! I'll kill the whole lot ! A bear—what ! A bear—is rubbish. Nothing's too good for Serge ! I love him ! Seriosha, will you have the bear ? ”

“ Leave me in peace ! ” replied Michailov irritably.

Again he had the sensation, as at their earlier encounter, that Arbusoff was not saying what he thought, but that some motive, wild and evil, lurked in all his sallies.

“ Oh, do take him ! ”

“ Let's start, gentlemen ! ” said Lieutenant Ivanoff.

“ Well, all right. If you won't—then don't ! If you want him, you've only to say so . . . haven't you ? Isn't that so, Seriosha ? ”

Michailov cast a rapid glance at Arbusoff and suddenly saw such an unconcealed, terrible hatred in his drunken, lowering eyes that he involuntarily turned away.

“ You're in a nice state ! ” he repeated furiously, proudly throwing back his handsome head. “ By the way, they haven't taken you to the fortress yet ? ”

“ I managed that with money ! ” answered Arbusoff gruffly.

Krause, Trenieff and the others went on ahead. Michailov put on his things, turned out the light, closed the studio and followed them.

Through the dark trees of the garden lights glimmered whitely, showing the outlines of the three carriages jet-black by contrast. They all took their places, and the vehicles dashed noisily through the streets with jangling bells.

As soon as all was still again, Lisa's little figure stepped out from behind the huge old apple-tree in Michailov's garden. In the darkness she could hardly be distinguished from the shrubs.

When the noise of the carriages driving up and the shouts of the drunken voices had recalled her to her senses, she had run from the steps into the garden, in order not to meet anybody at the door.

In the darkness she knocked her shoulders against branches and leaves, which showered their great cold drops all over her, so that her thin, wet blouse soon clung to her. She did not notice that she was shaking with cold, she only tried to force her way into the drenched thicket, to hide herself completely.

At length she heard the jovial party going down the steps,

out of the gate, and taking their seats in the carriages. And she also heard Arbusoff shout : "Serge, come and sit next to me ! "

At the sound of Michailov's name she shuddered.

Then came a loud tinkling of bells from the street, the ground trembled faintly, the sound of voices became more and more distant and finally died away into a silence that advanced from every side and laid its heavy burden on the dark garden. Isolated stars glittered in the unattainable heights, beyond the clouds, still higher and more remote.

Lisa softly left the garden like a ghost, but when she reached the middle of the courtyard, she paused in perplexity.

"Where now ?" she felt rather than thought.

Home ? Why ? There insults awaited her, there she was a dark problem that had ruined life. She was in a void, she could never be anything more to anybody, wherever she went.

Slowly Lisa passed the steps which she had run up so impatiently an hour earlier ; involuntarily she looked back at them.

Then she stood still. Once again she remembered how she had been turned out of the house, and suddenly she threw herself down, laid her head on the dirty steps, and remained there in a dull stupor as though dead.

After a time something soft and warm sniffed at her feet ; a dog's nose was suddenly pushed up close against her ear. The watch-dog stood before her, wagging his tail. In his wise, dark eyes shone a strangely mournful affection, expressive as they were of all that he could not say. Lisa put her arm round his shaggy neck and pressed her face against his damp coat.

The dog leapt up joyfully, panting, and suddenly licked her nose.

Lisa edged away mechanically, looked round, saw the dark garden and the remote stars, saw herself, small and miserable and of no use to anybody, hugging a strange dog on the dirty steps.

A wave of burning self-pity surged over her. At last she realized everything : that it was all over and that she must never see Michailov again. She did not blame him ; a

strange languid humility had taken possession of her. Yes, she loved him even now, more than ever, and must die because she could not live without him. That was all a matter of course. She simply couldn't go on living. Father had probably found out already where she had been. . . . Then it was better to die ! . . . What did that matter. . . . He did not need her love, it was not his fault that he didn't love her. But why did he caress her and kiss her ? Only because she was a woman ? Was such a thing possible ? She was something more than just a woman, she had something else besides the body of which he had spoken, here in her breast there had been something bright, something like a little sun. But now it all was empty, cold and terror stricken, so full of anguish. Was it possible that he was not sorry for her ? She loved him so !

She could not comprehend that this word, so sublime and beautiful, should be quite meaningless and prove nothing. Well, she loved him, but he did not want her love. He—simply did not want it !

Lisa remembered Eugenia Samoilovna, whom she could see in her smart red dress, as vividly as if she had been standing before her. Her heart contracted in agony ; yes, she was better, much better, than herself. How pitiful and inferior must her caresses have seemed compared with that woman's ! . . . And how ridiculous to have imagined as she lay in his arms that her embraces had filled him with unutterable delight, to have been happy in the thought.

A sensation of unendurable degradation oppressed her. She cowered down, as though to hide her miserable, unwanted body even from the stars.

Then she recalled the last scene.

She had forced herself upon him as a depraved woman might have done, with burning cheeks and eyes that pleaded for sensual endearments. How could she have done it ? No doubt he had simply loathed her at that moment. He did not want her, and had only yielded to her out of compassion for her importunity.

She felt as though her whole body had been polluted. She writhed on the steps, tried to jump up, slipped, leapt up again and rushed from the courtyard like a hunted thing.

CHAPTER XLVIII

THERE was noise and tumult in the club. Many of those who frequented it every day left when they saw Arbusoff's party beginning their carousals, for a row of some kind was only to be expected. The chairman of the club, who was present that evening and was sitting near the bar, was at a loss to know what to do.

Arbusoff was more completely intoxicated than he had ever been. He shouted, upset the bottles, continually demanded fresh champagne. His face was deathly pale, his eyes looked almost frenzied.

Two officers had joined the party, a grey-haired Tartar cavalry-captain and a handsome young cornet who was enraptured with Arbusoff ; and finally also the little student Tchish, who had only just come from the reading-room.

Even Naumoff drank that evening, although it did not seem to have any particular effect on him.

Michailov had drunk one glass after another and had turned dreadfully pale. His brain was unnaturally lucid, every sound, movement and word, was impressed upon his consciousness, yet at the same time he felt himself becoming intoxicated. As it were in delirium he looked round the circle with shining eyes, as though seeing the party for the first time. Ryskoff, on the contrary, who sat next to him quite stunned, blinded by the splendour around him, and proud to be in the company of Arbusoff and the officers, kept looking timidly at Tchish, as though he could be relied upon for help. The latter had hidden away in a corner, looking searchingly first at one and then at another ; he did not know whether the Tregulova affair were known, and was in perpetual anxiety lest any insinuations might be made. Curiously enough he particularly expected that Arbusoff would begin to speak about it scornfully and jeeringly, and on that account he sat the whole time on the

point of rising and going away, if this should happen. But at present he could not tear himself away ; he dreaded his little room with its bare walls.

Trenieff drank and shouted more than any one. He was in excellent spirits : now there was peace at home ; his wife had sent him away herself for a little amusement, and would welcome him affectionately. So he was in love with her again, and he longed to confide in some one how much he loved his wife and how delightful she was.

He edged up to Krause continually.

The tall cornet, who drank very little and looked as white as paste, at length became quite silent. His slanting eyebrows moved sharply ; it was evident that he was turning something over in his mind.

“ Drink, Krause ! ” cried Trenieff, pouring the wine into his glass. “ You’re a good fellow, even if you are eccentric ! Upon my word, I’m awfully fond of you ! Why are you always so thoughtful ? Let’s drink instead. . . Well, what are you thinking about ? . . . You can’t possibly brood over everything like that ! . . . Don’t you listen to him.”

He nudged Naumoff.

“ He lies, by God ! . . . You always tell lies, don’t you, old chap ? ” He turned to the sinister engineer with drunken familiarity.

Naumoff smiled coldly but made no reply.

Trenieff turned to Michailov and with an appearance of mystery, but so loudly that every one could hear, he said :

“ A clever chap, by God ; but tells lies about everything. All because he’s so full of hatred and rage : he’s a poor fellow who has probably had no luck in life, and now he cries out that life ought to be annihilated ! But I won’t have it ! Why indeed ? Life’s a grand affair ! But he’s right in many ways, by God ! He’s a good chap, after all, and I like him awfully. . . . I’m talking about you, Naumoff.”

Naumoff smiled scornfully, but still made no reply.

“ Who tells lies ? You do yourself ! ” began Arbusoff suddenly, having heard the end of the sentence across the table. “ It’s all perfectly right ! Life’s all bosh and that’s an end of it ! In my opinion you don’t need any philosophy

to teach you that much, and you don't want theories, either; it's quite simple, in itself it's bosh. . . . To the devil with it! . . . What do you think, Seriosha?"

Michailov looked at him with shining eyes, tried to answer, but only waved his hand. His handsome face was cheerful and friendly as a child's. He liked everything and thought it all remarkably interesting.

"No, it's you who are lying!" Trenieff struck the table with his fist. "There are lots of pleasant things in life. . . ."

"Well? . . . what?" asked Arbusoff ironically.

"How do you mean? Lots. . . . Well, women, love, friends, Nature. . . . all kinds of things."

"Damn it all!" cried Arbusoff savagely, "a happy love is commonplace, an unhappy one misery. There! Remember that! And friends? They're all friends and comrades till a bad day comes. It's one thing to drink together,—they'll do that—but they don't care a damn what passes in your soul. And they'll never find out either. . . . But what's the meaning of friendship, if that's not it? You may think some one's your friend, and all the time perhaps he's plotting to ruin your life. You, Seriosha, what do you think about it?" he asked suddenly, in a tone so ominous and almost menacing that Michailov looked up.

But Arbusoff's attention had been diverted to Ryskoff, who felt very much flattered by it.

"If some one's in the way, you can't get there yourself without ousting him. What do comrades matter then, and friends! Do you know what I think of you? Yes, and what Krause thinks? Yes, the tall German! . . . A mask, not a face. . . . and. . . . love, did you say?"

Arbusoff brought his hand down on the table:

"Vodka, yes, that's a fine thing. But I drink my blood, not wine, not vodka, and drown my trouble in it. People don't get drunk when they are happy, you don't want to water happiness. The first person to get drunk was one who couldn't endure life."

Trenieff replied with a violent denial.

"No, whatever you say, there is some good in it. Isn't there, Cyril Dmitrievitch?"

Tchish nodded his head, though at the moment nothing in the least pleasant occurred to him.

"Am I telling the truth?" The drunken Trenieff would not be satisfied with a silent assent.

"Certainly, it's true," corroborated the little student.

Arbusoff burst out laughing spitefully.

"If it's anybody's fault, it's people's own," continued Trenieff.

"Which people?" interrupted Arbusoff, blinking. "Those who thrash, or those who are thrashed? What do you think about it, Kyrik Dmitrievitch?"

Tchish felt the blood rushing to his face.

"Rot!" he said.

"What?" returned Arbusoff, drawing himself up slightly. His black eyes burnt irately, as though he were glad of an excuse to break out.

Tchish, who was looking sideways at him, turned pale.

"You take too great a liberty . . ." he murmured, rising.

"Too great? You . . ." yelled Arbusoff, but before he could rush up to him, Michailov seized his hand.

"Now, Sachar, what is the matter with you," he called to him.

"Let me alone!" Arbusoff tore himself away furiously.

"This doesn't concern you!"

"Stop . . . or I'll go away. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" continued Michailov.

Arbusoff turned quickly round to him and looked straight into his eyes for a minute.

"Now, sit down and drink!"

Arbusoff was silent, and did not avert his fixed gaze. Michailov, too, said nothing, but stared at him, still holding his hand tightly. It trembled more and more, but lay passive in his grasp. For some reason Michailov felt that Arbusoff would strike him as soon as he released his hand. He turned pale, but grasped it more tightly.

Suddenly the hand ceased to tremble and grew powerless. Arbusoff freed himself mechanically.

"Don't do that again! I don't care for that sort of thing."

Then he shouted so that his voice resounded through the whole club:

"Now, drink, you chaps! Kyrik Dmitrievitch, finish your glass! I'm drunk! Now, your hand. . . ."

Tchish did not want to shake hands, but the others surrounded him and persuaded him to do so. Arbusoff himself approached him, smiling good-humouredly.

"Now that's over. . . . What's the good of that! . . . Let's make it up!"

"Be reasonable, Kyril Dmitrievitch, it's no use! . . . You see he's drunk!" whispered Trenieff across the table.

At length Tchish stretched out his hand, without raising his eyes.

"Now, that's right!" said Arbusoff, shaking his hand cordially, but forgetting him again immediately. For a time he remained quiet, drinking, and apparently wrapped in his own thoughts.

Trenieff seated himself next to Tchish and put his arm round him affectionately.

"Why do you make such a fuss about it? It's not worth it. Whom won't a mad dog attack?"

Arbusoff burst out laughing.

"So I'm a mad dog, am I? Bravo, captain! Right you are! Kind regards to your wife, captain!"

Trenieff looked round at him, saying good-naturedly to Tchish:

"There, you see what he's like. He's the same with every one . . . but I'm awfully fond of him . . .!"

"And I can't bear the sight of you, captain," Arbusoff fumed, evidently seeking a quarrel.

"Now there you are," said Trenieff placidly and confidentially to Tchish, "didn't I say so? He can't stand me . . . such a blockhead. . . ."

Arbusoff scratched his neck complacently.

"Well, all right . . . we can't all be as clever as you!"

Then suddenly he flared out.

"And do you know, gentlemen, that a future celebrated author is here in our midst! Yes, a remarkable intellect!"

Ryskoff, turning pale, hardly breathed. But as Arbusoff smiled maliciously at him, he blushed violently, cleared his throat and murmured: "Sachar Maximitch, you promised not to . . ."

Arbusoff looked amazed.

"How do you know I mean you. Perhaps it's myself—the celebrated author? Oh, it's you, is it? I didn't know

that ! But of course if you feel it applies to yourself, it's certainly you. Gentlemen, I have the honour to introduce to you the future Tolstoi. Pay no attention to his being only a clerk of the revenue, and I must say he's no beauty ! "

Ryskoff did not know how to escape him.

" No, that wasn't what I meant . . . because I . . . on the contrary . . . what an idea ! "

Arbusoff did not listen to him.

" Gentlemen, would you like me to read aloud to you the most recent work of our renowned author ? What ? "

" That's very interesting ! " said fat Lieutenant Ivanoff, to whom the presence of a clerk had been distasteful from the beginning.

" Do read it, do read it, Sachar Maximitch ! " cried the handsome cornet.

Without delay Arbusoff felt in his pocket and drew out a thin blue exercise-book which Tchish recognized at once.

" Now listen, gentlemen ! . . . ' Love, a story by Alexander Ryskoff.' "

" Sachar Maximitch, I beg you . . . how can you . . . I beg of you ! . . . Why do you make fun of me ! "

" I'm not, I want to please you and ourselves ! "

" No, I implore you not to ! " murmured Ryskoff, whose brow was flushed and covered with perspiration, getting up and stretching out his hand for the book.

" No, brother, what is written is written. . . . So now, gentlemen, listen : ' Alexander walked slowly down the avenue in the park. His pale face and lofty brow, on which the soft chestnut hair curled . . .' "

" Sachar Maximitch ! " with the courage of despair Ryskoff tried to seize the book. " I won't have it ! " . . .

Arbusoff turned slowly and deliberately towards him.

" You won't ? " he said, repeating Ryskoff's words. " You won't al-low it ? What a pity ! I should have liked to read it ! "

" No ! " Ryskoff smiled piteously.

" Not ? . . . well, go to the devil . . . take it ! " cried Arbusoff furiously, and he hurled the book in his face.

Ryskoff staggered back, picked up the book, which had struck his chin in the shape of a fan, and put it in his coat-pocket.

His expression was so lamentable and showed so plainly that he dared not feel insulted or even say a word that they were all embarrassed. Even Lieutenant Ivanoff turned away. Arbusoff looked round spitefully.

"That's what they're like, these authors," he muttered through his teeth. "Ah, engineer! To your health, to your theory! although you and your theory are both crazy. Drink!"

Naumoff raised his glass.

Arbusoff looked across the table, as though seeking a fresh sacrifice.

"Krause!" he cried. "You German! Are you soon going to shoot yourself?"

"In a minute," answered Krause coldly and arrogantly.

It was so unexpected that several men burst out laughing.

"There now!" cried Arbusoff disconcerted. "How do you mean, in a minute? Here?"

"Here, in a minute," repeated Krause as coldly and haughtily as before.

At the same moment they all noticed that his face turned completely, even unpleasantly pale.

"You're having us on!" cried Arbusoff.

"I never jest," answered Krause almost inaudibly.

And immediately after he rose up to his full height, incredibly tall, straight and thin, with a scornful look in his face, from which his slanting eyebrows stood out in sharp relief.

For the first time it struck many of them that Krause was in full dress: in a magnificent new uniform with a silver sabretache and patent-leather boots.

There was a strange confusion at the drunken table, covered with bottles, glasses, and dirty plates, and streaming with wine like blood. Tchish and Michailov jumped up involuntarily from their seats. Naumoff tried to speak, but Krause looked at him so curiously that he did not utter a word. Only Arbusoff tried to smile.

"There's a German for you!"

Krause gazed at him with the same cold dignity.

"Yes, I'm going to shoot myself in a minute," he said, with perfect composure, "which is not of special importance, and . . . I have my reasons for doing it just here. I was

waiting for a moment when it wouldn't seem particularly dreadful, but at the most ridiculous and futile. . . . So it should be. But I should like to say this: don't think a tragedy is being enacted. . . . I can't live, but not because he has been talking like that——” Krause nodded his head in Naumoff's direction. “Let others live, if they can . . . I can't. For my part I won't, because to me its simply uninteresting. That's all. To me life is not a tragedy, nor a horror, nor a senseless episode, but merely uninteresting. Nature and beauty are so trivial, one gets so tired of them . . . love is so petty . . . humanity—simply foolish. The mysteries of the universe are impenetrable, and even should one fathom them it would be just as dull as before. Everything is as uninteresting as what we know already. In eternity there is nothing either small or large, and therefore even a match is a mystery and a miracle . . . but we know the match and it is uninteresting. And it's the same with everything. In the same way God would be tedious if we could see Him. Why have a God at all? It's superfluous. I wanted to say, too, that I don't preach, as he does,” again Krause indicated Naumoff, “simply because it doesn't interest me personally; it may others, perhaps. And then I wanted to say good-bye, because I don't think we shall ever meet again . . . and if we do—it'll be just as boring as ever. Enough! ”

They were all standing by the time he had come to the end of his broken, insane speech. Everybody and nobody believed it. It was a weird sight, this ring of pale faces and shining eyes round the table, and, in the midst of the general silence, the cornet's cold, indifferent voice.

But suddenly there was a shrill cry. The young officer, supporting himself convulsively at the table with both hands, cried uninterruptedly in one tone :

“He's going to shoot himself, going to shoot himself, going to shoot himself. . . .”

There was confusion and uproar. Chairs were upset. Some one rushed up to Cornet Krause with outstretched hands. But as the cornet's deathly face was turned towards him and the slanting eyebrows made a scarcely perceptible movement of surprise or command, he stood still, his arms still extended. At that moment they all felt that Krause

recoiled, and a void seemed to enfold him ; only his ghostly face gleamed across from a distance.

And then, extremely deftly, he drew a pistol out of his breeches-pocket, put the barrel quickly into his mouth and pulled the trigger.

It was strange that nobody had realised the actual moment, though instinctively they staggered back and shut their eyes. Not till the cornet's long body, upsetting a chair, crashed heavily to the ground did they come to their senses and run towards him.

CHAPTER XLIX

ALL the lights were turned down in the club ; in the semi-darkness the officers, who had come running from every direction, thronged in bewilderment. Soon afterwards the colonel of the regiment, a handsome grey-haired man, arrived. Deeply moved, he went straight to the corpse in his cap and coat, without greeting the others.

Only one faint yellow flame was burning behind the bar, pallidly illuminating the large disordered room. The table, still laid, had been hurriedly thrust into a corner, and Cornet Krause's body lay on the cleared space among the cigarette-ends and sweepings.

A clean table-cloth, fetched for the purpose from the bar, covered the long motionless figure. The soles of the patent-leather boots protruded from the lower end, the toes turned out ; dark blood stains oozed from the head.

One of the officers hurried in front and raised the edge of the table-cloth ; involuntarily the colonel shrank back ; there, where one expected to see the thin well-known face with the slanting brows, was a hideous mass of blood and flesh.

The colonel took off his cap and crossed himself. His handsome face was furrowed with grief ; his lips trembled.

"This is frightful !" he said, addressing nobody in particular. "And so unexpected."

The fat lieutenant threw up his hands helplessly.

"In my opinion it's . . . it's . . . simply awful ! I can't realise it . . . I can't realise it . . ."

The colonel shrugged his shoulders impatiently and turned aside. In the doorway he looked round again at the long white body. The face was already covered again.

"Yes, it's terrible," he repeated, and went out.

Small groups of officers with pale faces and terrified eyes collected in all the rooms and even in the hall. No one understood it, although rumours of Krause's eccentricity had already been persistently circulated in the regiment.

Now they all remembered a number of details which presaged this ghastly end, and every one thought it odd that nobody had anticipated it. Now they discussed his solitary way of living, so widely opposed to all the ordinary amusements of military circles, his 'cello playing at night, his continual reading, latterly a perfect mania with him ; they talked of his habit of kindling bonfires during drill on the plain and staring into the fire for hours.

A short, dark, extraordinarily versatile officer, who had been more intimate with Krause than his other regimental comrades, was talking to a group of officers who listened to every word with strained and anxious curiosity :

" . . . So I went to see him yesterday about three o'clock, and he wasn't dressed ; sitting on the bed holding a boot in his hands. . . . I asked him : ' What do you see there ? ' and he said : ' That's just it—nothing ! ' Then he laughed, flung the boot away and lay down again. ' It's simply loathsome,' he said. ' What's loathsome ? ' I asked. ' Everything,' said he. And his face, you know, really as if he loathed everything except death. By God, I thought at once he was in a bad way. . . . "

" But it's a fact—one does get sick of it," said an elderly officer suddenly. " Always the same, always the same—drill, careers, conduct, cards, and vodka. One does get desperately bored with it ! If there could only be a war. . . . That would be splendid, my word ! "

They listened absorbedly. They all felt strangely oppressed and ill at ease : in the next room lay the mysterious corpse, nobody was playing cards, or drinking, all the rooms were full of excited, agitated people. Only an hour ago they had been living their everyday accustomed life, but a sudden shot had disorganised everything. Now they had all lost their heads, no one realised anything or knew what to say or do. The name Krause was suddenly as it were effaced, they spoke of him only as " he," and even this word was whispered, with a certain reverential esteem.

" I believe it was only a fit of despondency, sudden cowardice, nothing more ! " abruptly observed a foppish lieutenant, whose thoughts were always running on the staff-college and who considered himself far above the other members of the regiment.

"What do you think was cowardly about it?" replied the elderly officer.

"Well, any one can do that; he fired a bullet into his mouth, and now you say he was right. Well, that's an easy way out. A man must fight and keep up his courage, go forward."

"Easy?" The elderly officer closed his eyes ironically.
"You try it!"

The lieutenant looked at him scornfully and made the first reply that entered his head:

"For an officer of the Russian army that is . . . positively unworthy. . . ."

The elderly officer went without answering into the room where Krause lay, looked long at the thin white figure, as though by so doing he might attain some clarity of vision, crossed himself furtively and abruptly and hurried away from the club.

The others began to disperse after he had gone. But for a long time the excited voices of the officers echoed through the silence of the sleeping streets.

The club was deserted. Only Michailov Dchenieff, Arbusoff, and Naumoff remained in the small room behind the bar.

The waiters placed a little table for them and lighted candles. Michailov, with both hands supporting his handsome head, gazed into the flame with gleaming eyes. Arbusoff paced heavily from one corner to another. Naumoff was sitting in shadow, so that the expression of his face could not be seen.

They were all depressed. They could not recover: for some minutes it had all seemed a weird nightmare that oppressed them, an impossibility, an inconceivable, fantastic absurdity.

The report of the shot still rang in their ears, they still saw the long white face and the slanting eyebrows; and at that last moment something had gripped their hearts—but what it was nobody knew. And no one could decide to open a conversation.

Not until the last officers had left and their voices had died away, to be replaced by an audible silence that crept through the deserted rooms like a chill, did Arbusoff shake himself, as though to cast off an invisible burden, and burst out:

“There’s a nice business . . . and the German too. Who would have thought it ! And so suddenly, that’s the great thing. Till the last moment I thought he was joking. Poor old fellow . . . but now, what is one to do ? We shall all come to it in the end. Whether we die to-day, or to-morrow. . . . It’s all the same ! ”

“Yes, of course,” said Michailov, without averting his mesmerized gaze from the flame. “But yet . . . how amazing it all is . . . dreadful . . . all the same.”

Arbusoff strode about the room for some time, his powerful head sunk. Then he stood still, tossed his head back impetuously and cried :

“Damn it, gentlemen, shall we drink to the peace of his soul ? It’s awful.”

He tore open his shirt-collar, exposing his broad bull-neck.

“Let’s drink ! ”

Michailov shrugged his shoulders almost imperceptibly, as though to say that now nothing mattered.

Arbusoff went into the refreshment-room and soon returned with a drowsy, dull waiter carrying two bottles and glasses.

Arbusoff’s face, which had grown paler still, twitched curiously.

“He’s lying there ! ” he said, with a distorted smile, pouring the wine into the glasses with his shaking hand.

Michailov quickly raised his head, looked at him, and then riveted his eyes on the candle once more.

“Now,” said Arbusoff, offering him a glass, “take it, Seriosha ! ”

Michailov took it abstractedly.

“And you, engineer . . . drink ! ” cried Arbusoff. “What have you hidden yourself away for ? You haven’t a good conscience, I suppose ? ”

Naumoff came out of his corner and approached the table. His face was pale and convulsed like Arbusoff’s, but the old hard resolute expression was in his eyes.

“Give it to me ! ” he said abruptly.

Arbusoff pushed the glass towards him ; the engineer took it, not drinking, however, but looking mockingly at Arbusoff, the glass in his hand.

"What do you mean? Do you suppose by any chance that I was the cause of Krause's death?"

He evidently did not doubt that the answer would be in the affirmative and awaited it like a blow that he must parry.

Arbusoff fixed his dark, blood-shot eyes on him, as though willing to accept the challenge.

"Yes, you!" he replied gruffly.

A shadow passed across Naumoff's face. After a while he began with a forced smile:

"I should not disclaim the honour, but in this case I regret to say I've had no participation in it whatever."

"How do you make that out?" Arbusoff tossed his head ironically.

"No," continued Naumoff resolutely, "nobody can force a man to believe that he must die if he wants to live . . . no persuasion and no theories can accomplish that. What an absurd idea! If Krause's mind hadn't been occupied with the thought for a long time . . ."

"Yes, brother," interrupted Arbusoff, "but then if some one says the right word at the right time, that helps. Occupied with it, yes, certainly—but . . ."

"And I added the last drop? . . . Well, and if I did? Perhaps all the better! That doesn't frighten me!"

"Listen!" said Michailov, with sudden passion. "All right . . . so be it. But just for a minute let us abandon words and theories. As a human being, if only for once in your life—tell me if you don't think it's a dreadful thing that has happened? Aren't you sorry about it? Do you believe what you say? Not with your brain, no, but in your heart, do you believe it?"

"Not dreadful—I'm not sorry. I believe it." Naumoff answered thoughtfully, as though weighing every word.

Michailov hung his head helplessly. And Arbusoff ceased to run to and fro, and once more fixed his eyes on the engineer.

Naumoff put his glass down violently on the table, so that the wine overflowed, and he began to speak quickly in a hysterical voice:

"Listen! Tell me yourself! Look your own life straight in the face for once without flinching; is it possible that you are happy? Is it possible that there was ever one single

moment in your life that you would really like to live over again ? Well, yes . . . there were happy minutes, perhaps, but what are—minutes ? . . . Were they such that you would like to go through your whole life again from the beginning, only so that this one moment might be repeated ? . . . Well ? ”

Leaning over the table, he fixed his shining eyes on Michailov's face.

Michailov, who had raised his head again, met his glance. And a vision of his whole life filed past as in a black mirror.

He shook his head to free himself from this morbid oppression and said decidedly :

“ No ! ”

Arbusoff laughed despondently.

Naumoff's face became feverishly animated, as though lit up by a sinister radiance.

“ Then what do you expect of me ? What is the good of this life to you ? What pleasure was it to that unhappy Krause, what is it to milliards of crushed, deceived people ? Why ? From the very beginning of all things to the present day—strife—and ever strife ! Nations vanish, civilizations crumble, and all the time we go straight on, straight on, falling, stifling, cursing, flooding the whole earth with our blood and tears. And what is the ultimate use of all that ? For what reason do we believe in a happier future ? Is it even possible ? Sorrow is the only motive of life. Everything that moves, all that we do, our whole science, philosophy, religion, and all the arts, all that we have built up strongly and firmly as a Babylonian tower, would be dashed to the ground if humanity could feel happy even for a minute. No life without suffering—so why live ? Just tell me that, please. . . . ”

Naumoff paused, as though actually expecting an answer ; but nobody replied. Michailov stared into the flame, and Arbusoff, his feet wide apart and his heavy wide-browed head sunk, did not seem to contemplate a response, though his eyes never left Naumoff's lips.

“ Nobody knows ! ” began the engineer again. “ And whoever pretends to is lying. We've invented gods, high-sounding words, and vague ideals—the whole overcrowded arsenal of futility, something like the paper kites which the

Chinese sent up against the French cannon. But even were that not the case, let the heavens open and God Himself appear to us in all His glory, let us know what we have not even guessed before, let the actual bliss begin. . . . What's the good of that to us? . . . I at least would resolutely decline it with my human intelligence. What do I care if my spirit there shines forth like the morning star, if here I am choked with the filth of senselessness and torments. And what do I care if some Ivan Ivanovitch in the four hundred billionth century is clothed in blue vestments and fans himself with palm branches? First of all I've got to snuff out down here. No, even if He should receive us into His glory, we shall not forgive Him for leaving us so long to perish in gloom and misery. Can we forgive, can we forget? . . . We're not dogs that we should forgive everything for alms. . . . I, Naumoff, as I am here, living in my individuality, I refuse this belated bliss. And what else do you expect from me than hatred? I've driven Krause to his death, good. . . . And I'd drive the whole world to it, if I could . . . with the greatest pleasure. And, in giving them a helping hand, I should know that I was not only satisfying my own hatred, but doing a kindness to millions."

Naumoff's voice broke off and he was silent. He suffered visibly, till the very agony became a delight, a terrible anguish, which was not lost upon his hearers.

He seized a glass and took a long drink, almost choking over the wine.

"Well, well," said Arbusoff at length, "he's talked our heads off. But if you'd only shot yourself instead, damned engineer! Go to the devil! And we'll go home, we've sat here long enough. I'm sure I shall kill either somebody else or myself . . . let's be off."

He took his cap and walked to the door. But there he suddenly stood still and turned round with a twisted smile.

"What, aren't we going to have a look at our friend? Let's see what he's doing."

Michailov rose mechanically. He was haggard, but absolutely sober, though he reeled like a drunken man.

They went into the refreshment-room, Naumoff following them with glittering eyes.

CHAPTER L

THE grey, pale morning was already peering in at the windows ; in the empty, disordered rooms it was cheerless and cold. Packs of cards and stumps of chalk still lay on the ombre tables where they had been flung down, the billiard balls still rested on the green cloth of the table ; the chairs were pushed apart, as though the players had only just stood up and gone away.

Krause's body was still lying on the floor, under a white tablecloth, looking longer and thinner than ever in the morning light, as though it had stretched in the night.

They all thought how strange it was that he had lain there the whole night, on the cold, dirty floor, without moving a limb. Suddenly a fantastic thought flashed through Michailov's head : perhaps he had got up, tall and white, with a shattered head, and approached their door, observing them through the chink with dead white eyes.

Looking round instinctively, he suddenly noticed traces of blood, which reached as far as the door. A cold, senseless shudder ran down his back. He laughed nervously and went quickly out of the room.

Naumoff paid no attention to him, as though he had not heard the laughter. Arbusoff interrupted his meditations by asking :

“ Well, now . . . shall we be going too, engineer ? ”

Naumoff looked sadly at Arbusoff. His face was completely changed : he seemed to be profoundly absorbed in himself, a gentle sadness played round his compressed lips, as though at that moment, after all his tempestuous ideas had faded, only a simple human melancholy remained.

“ What's to be done, brother ? ” said Arbusoff in a shaking voice. “ One can't do anything ! That's what comes of your theories ! Pity about Krause ; he was a nice fellow ! Well, but that's the end of it ! Let's be going ! ”

As they stepped into the carriage in the courtyard Arbusoff turned again to Michailov, who had taken leave of them as he went out.

"How do you feel, Seriosha?" he asked, as though he wanted to hear a final word—the last and most significant.

Michailov waved his hand dejectedly and walked quickly along the echoing wood pavement.

The little town was already awake. Peasant women with pots and baskets made of birch-bark were going to the market, old women in dark shawls stood about in the porch of the open church, cartloads of wood were being drawn along, the grey village curs running after them. The day had begun.

CHAPTER LI

The plumes of the hearse, high above the crowd, nodded gently in the breeze.

Behind the coffin the officers walked in separate groups, with the colonel at their head. Two soldiers were leading the dead man's horse, covered with a black cloth, by the bridle. All alone in its curious trapping, it seemed to be the only creature who had been intimate with him.

The funeral was conducted with great ceremony and unusual display of mourning. The whole town lined both sides of the road ; there was a strained horror on every face, and they looked long after the swaying catafalque.

When the music ceased there began the soft nasal singing of the choir, which stretched far beyond the procession, and when the choir was silent the booming of the church-yard bells came nearer and nearer.

At last the white gate with the crooked yellow crosses came in sight ; beyond the crumbling stone wall, which was surrounded by a deep moat, were wreaths of withered flowers, crosses, and monuments. The catafalque trembled violently for the last time and halted.

The black vestments of the priests and the odd long-skirted caftans of the choristers flowed continuously through the wide-open gate, as though they were at home there ; behind them poured the crowd.

The bells gradually died away, and in the silence that followed the hasty scraping of feet and the muffled voices of the officers who were lifting the coffin down from the hearse seemed strangely distinct. Nobody quite knew how it ought to be done, and so they proceeded with exaggerated zeal : the officers began to force their way to and fro, to run from one side to the other, and in their midst faces red with exertion and bent backs were visible. The coffin swayed heavily and was suddenly lowered. Stumbling against one

another, the officers carried it down the middle of the path which the crowd had made by dispersing, along the avenue, which was bordered by railings and monuments and strewn with yellow leaves.

Everybody thought the tramping of footsteps and the heavy thud of the tall metal candlesticks as they were disposed round the coffin sounded too loud on the stone flags of the small empty church.

Then all sounds ceased, and were replaced by a solemn, anxious silence, till suddenly a soft aged voice was heard in an undertone but yet very distinctly : "Blessed be God, the Lord."

The crowd moved, streamed forward, and was still. The colonel bowed his grey head, as though he would take upon himself the whole burden of the grand words, and did not raise it till all was over.

The chant of the choristers began loudly, filling the whole church with the sustained waves of its melting tones, and hardly was it over when another more powerful voice rang out, thundering and pitilessly : "Let us pray to God!"

The sound rolled away beneath the arches.

"Lord, have mercy!" responded the choir timidly and softly.

The officers listened in silence, their heads lowered ; the thronging crowd sighed ; the tall candles, whose yellow flames burned up and flickered down, were enveloped by the grey-blue clouds from the small censer. The lid of the coffin was opened, and under the white misty shimmer of the muslin the terrible outline of a figure was visible, which nobody seemed to know.

Breathing became difficult : an uneasy sadness floated across from the strange-sounding words of the priests, the sweet fragrance of incense confused the brain, cold, milky light shone down from the windows, and through it all, soft and distinct, resounded the voices :

"... in truth all is vanity of vanities ; for life is a shadow and a dream. . . ."

The utterances of the priests and the echoing responses of the choir seemed endlessly protracted. Sometimes the voices of the choristers were raised, seeming to promise a joyful song, then the single plaintive voice succeeded them.

People grew very tired of standing ; the ceremony was endless.

" My God, is this going on for ever ! " thought one of the young cornets, quite dejected. " And how funny it is, really : there he lies and doesn't hear a single sound. It makes us sad and he doesn't care. If only they'd hurry up. But can it be that he feels nothing more, absolutely nothing ? Not even that he doesn't feel ? "

He imagined how, one day, sooner or later, he too would lie under the white muslin, with the same chants and incense and the same white radiance around him. And he would see and hear nothing more. What did it signify in the face of this that they had been drinking at Naumoff's yesterday and that he had lost fifty roubles to Lieutenant Kolpakoff. It signified nothing, because at the moment he was still alive, standing, hearing, thinking. It did not matter in the least that Katia had been angry yesterday because he tried to kiss her, and had rapped his knuckles . . . dear Katia ! . . . And yet some day he will lie like that and hear nothing ! . . . Dreadful ! . . .

" Poor, poor Krause ! " thought the young cornet, and tears came into his eyes.

All the people standing round him began to move and clear their throats : the ceremony of the last kiss was about to take place. The officers ascended the steps one after the other, crossed themselves hurriedly, looked aghast at the mutilated, unfamiliar face with the tightly-closed lips, lightly kissed the chilly hand, and then hastened away.

The same inappropriate activity was shown when the corpse was put into the coffin ; quick blows of the hammer fell on the nails, which went easily into the fresh wood. Then the coffin was lifted, swayed, and was lowered. The crowd poured out of the church.

" Holy God, holy and strong, holy and immortal . . ." began the choir. The black vestments of the priests were already visible far ahead among the graves and crosses.

The day was white and clear. The sky was bright and distant, and spread its cold brilliance over everything, over the yellow trees and fox-coloured leaves, over the black velvet of the vestments and the officers' silver epaulettes, over the bulging lid of the coffin, which was set down close

to the edge of a deep, reddish grave. The whole churchyard seemed to have become strangely wider and clearer since the trees had lost almost all their leaves. The bare fields shimmered between the crosses and the trees ; an unending pathos floated across, and from the blue horizon the boundless despondency of the Steppes looked on. Pale Nature was passing gently away, the trees stood motionless and silently the yellow leaves fell to the ground.

Hurriedly, almost indistinctly, the displeasing voice continued to read with a softness intensified under the immeasurable vault of the distant, remote sky :

“ Be thou eternally remembered, thou, our brother ! ”

“ Eternal . . . eternal, eternal re-mem-brance ! ” loud and almost despairing rose the cry of the choristers, and the bells jangled, trying to interrupt and surpass one another. Soldiers came up with spades, people thronged to the graveside, the coffin-lid slowly began to move and sank down, swaying into the pit where there is neither light nor life, but only everlasting death.

The reports of the short, dry salvos which Lieutenant Ivanoff, his face red with exertion and his cap pushed back had directed detonated against the wall.

Everybody started in alarm. A few branches stirred and several leaves fluttered down into the grave, like a parting gift from the earth. One more salvo . . . and yet another. . . . The priests began to sing more loudly, and lumps of clay suddenly fell in showers with dull thuds on the coffin.

The grave was levelled, thickly covered with green, pungent fir branches, and a new white cross, which looked mysteriously large among the graves and monuments, was hastily put up.

The priests went away and the colonel drove off. The officers still remained standing by the grave for a while, as though they did not know what to do next ; all at once they, too, began to disperse. Murmurs became audible. . . . A pretty girl hurried past to overtake her family, and one of the officers made some joke about her. . . . Somebody laughed.

Life, which had been quiet and thoughtful for a minute at the graveside, began to go its careless way again.

CHAPTER LII

TCHISH strode quickly through the town, his coat open as though he were warm.

He was grieved on the dead man's account that not one of Krause's comparatively intimate friends besides himself and Ryskoff had been to the churchyard, as though poor Krause could see that already they had all forsaken and forgotten him.

"That blockhead Arbusoff was absolutely right," thought Tchish bitterly, "they're all friends and comrades up to a certain point. . . . At the very most till death, that's quite right. There's no one who hasn't been forgotten. One remembers people like Pushkin . . . but even then it's not Pushkin himself, but only a certain literary celebrity . . . it's vile!"

Tchish felt agitated; he had been unable to concentrate his thoughts since Krause's death. He slept lightly at night, still hearing in his dreams the crack of the shot and the fall of the body. The pale face with those curious slanting eyebrows was constantly before his eyes.

"Poor chap," he thought—"why? And that Naumoff—what a cad! He didn't know whom he had to deal with!"

Tchish did not doubt that Cornet Krause's suicide had been solely due to Naumoff's influence, and he longed to meet the engineer again, to tell him to his face that he was guilty of Krause's death.

"Wait a minute, Kyril Dmitrievitch!" Ryskoff's voice sounded behind him.

Ryskoff, who was equally depressed, walked silently by his side, looking abstractedly at his feet.

"Yes . . ." said Tchish at length. "Well, what do you say to it all?"

"Yes, what indeed?" said Ryskoff mournfully. "I often contemplate it myself. Really, why prolong it?

Then at least it's over once and for all. You know, I entirely agree with M. Naumoff."

Tchish stopped.

"What are you talking about, Ryskoff!" he cried indignantly. "The devil knows what's the meaning of it! Is our time so vile or is it something in the air? Surely you must realize how stupid and mean and loathsome it is?"

"How do you mean?" cried Ryskoff.

"This is what I mean! The suicide is a human being who capitulates to life, runs away from it, like a coward! And, above all things, a man has no right to interrupt or destroy a life that he has not created."

"But why not, Kyril Dmitrievitch?" replied Ryskoff, unconvinced.

This short simple question somewhat embarrassed Tchish, since there was no equally short and simple answer to it. Ryskoff noticed his confusion and swung his walking-stick.

"An odd question!" said Tchish at length.

"In what way, odd? In my opinion it's the only logical question. You say—one has no right, and I ask—why?"

"Just because you didn't create life!" repeated the little student, annoyed by the consciousness that his argument was inconclusive.

Ryskoff smiled almost imperceptibly.

"Yes, but why, because I haven't . . ." he observed, not without indulgence. "I didn't ask to be burdened with it, or undertake to preserve it. That's only just preached at random, Kyril Dmitrievitch, and in reality it's nothing but words! . . . And if I'm sick of life? If it's too hard for me to live?"

"Hard! Anything else! I suppose you'd like life to be one incessant carnival week, wouldn't you? Life's not an amusement, Ryskoff, but a duty; and even if it is hard, one must fight and not lose heart!"

"Oh, Kyril Dmitrievitch, you're always saying 'one must do this, one must do that,' but why must one?"

"Because otherwise humanity would become extinct or perhaps turn into animals and run about on four legs!"

"Well, God help us!"

Tchish started up, like a frightened sparrow.

"Oh, certainly, if that's the way you look at it!" he

said contemptuously. And after a short silence he added scornfully : " Apparently you've been infected by Naumoffism, too, Ryskoff ! "

" Not at all. I simply agree with him . . . if not in everything . . . "

Tchish threw a sidelong glance at him and snorted excitedly : " Not in everything ? Well, what don't you agree with ? "

" Well, altogether . . . I'm more in sympathy with Krause's point of view. . . . That's to say, if any one . . . I mean, one ought to solve the problem for oneself alone and not for others . . . and that all theories about it are stupid."

" You're talking nonsense, Ryskoff ! " Tchish could restrain himself no longer.

Ryskoff reddened slightly and ceased to swing his walking-stick, but his expression remained one of inner conviction, undisturbed by any arguments. Tchish realized at once that Ryskoff had been talking to Naumoff, and already regarded himself as a disciple of the new doctrine, proud to be the possessor of strange thoughts and words, too lofty for ordinary human beings.

" And your Naumoff," continued Tchish angrily, " is simply a scoundrel ! People of that sort ought to be shot like mad dogs ! He knows perfectly well what harm he's doing ! The deuce only knows what it all means ! "

Ryskoff looked indulgently at the little student, who was incapable of understanding them, and made no reply.

For some time they walked on in silence. Tchish was seething inwardly and convulsed with nervous spasms. But, controlling his rage, he began almost unintelligibly :

" Don't you understand . . . Ryskoff . . . that all this nonsense is simply the result of the present transition period ? It is produced by the general intellectual despondency. A new wave will come and sweep away this Naumoffism from the face of the earth. It seems to you to-day the climax of wisdom to preach self-destruction, but in a few years you'll turn away in disgust from these dead creatures. Let cowards and misanthropists slink round the corner, but the proud strong man will remain at his post till the end. The future belongs to the People, and

the victory is indubitable. We live for this triumph of the bright days to come, and for the golden future of mankind."

Tchish, who at that moment probably saw the countless multitudes of the victorious People and the fluttering red flags, was inspired by enthusiasm, his eyes flashed, he pushed his old cap to the back of his head and shouted the last words right across the street.

Beside them were grey fences, small middle-class houses, vegetable gardens, empty plots of ground choked with weeds and thistles, and down the middle of the street a pig trotted lazily.

Ryskoff at first felt disheartened by the incomprehensible words "Future, People, Humanity," then it annoyed him that the little student should take so sanguine a view.

"What's the matter with him? What's he looking forward to?" he thought, and aloud he said: "Yes, but isn't that all the same to you, Kyril Dmitrievitch? . . . When will that be, I'd like to know!"

Tchish suddenly halted.

"You're not that pig, are you, Ryskoff?" He pointed to it. "There's just this difference between that pig and a reasoning human being, that the pig lives only for itself, while man cannot disregard his relation to humanity. Don't you listen to these misanthropists, who don't know themselves what they are doing! . . . But that's enough. Come and see me one day . . . then we can discuss it. . . . It's time for me to go now . . . good-bye!"

They took leave of one another. The little student turned down the next by-street and went along by the endless fence, small and solitary, in his soul a weary burden of vexation. Ryskoff, however, sauntered slowly down the street, flourishing his stick, and gazing steadily before him.

The passers-by eyed him inquisitively: it was already known all over the town that he had been present at Krause's suicide, and this elevated him to the rank of one of the heroes of the day.

Ryskoff noticed these glances, interpreted them in his own way and assumed an air of arrogance. It seemed to him that his expression must be romantically beautiful, and that his whole figure must shadow forth a mysterious destiny. Why that should be he did not know, but he felt

himself a hero. And involuntarily he imagined himself in Cornet Krause's position, the pistol in his steady hand, making a last speech full of bitterness and sarcasm.

" You may think he's nothing, a poor clerk like that, and all the time he is—a hero ! A tragic nature ! Yes, he despised this miserable life and chose death. . . . "

Ryskoff almost choked with pride.

He walked along the street, his head uplifted and burning with the phantasies that filled it. Already he pictured some very pretty girl who would fall in love with him after his death for the sake of his sufferings, and then say :

" He knew no love, and he longed for it so ardently. . . . They did not, they could not understand him, and so he died ! I shall be his bride beyond the grave ! "

Ryskoff's nose began to itch with self-pity. He was so engrossed in his dreams that he did not even notice when he reached his house. Like a drunken man, he stared unseeingly for a time at the wretched back-building which he had known since childhood.

But suddenly it struck him that the very next day he had to make his excuses for some error to his chief, who was very much displeased at his participation in the Krause affair. He turned cold and cowered. . . . What on earth would become of him if they sacked him from the office ?

Ryskoff strode through the courtyard, and ran into the vegetable garden, without going into the house : a terrible fear seized him, he did not want to see his room or the smelly kitchen, or hear his mother's everlasting reproaches.

All the alleys and vegetable gardens of this street led to a wide swamp, into which half their broken fences sank. The white sky hung close to the earth, the autumn wind sighed faintly in the drooping willows and in the dry reeds swaying evenly to and fro. One single moaning cadence drifted perpetually across the whole marsh. Beyond the reeds, almost in the middle, the open water of the lake shimmered whitely. A black spot circled in its midst on the ruffled surface. Ryskoff realized mechanically that it was a shot duck.

" Let its wings droop . . . they're broken . . . it'll perish . . . freeze . . . it would be better to drown at once. But it will go on living. The early frosts will come,

every day the water will narrow round it . . . then it will dash itself against the ice, go to sleep at night, and be covered with ice. Silly bird!"

Ryskoff would not wait! Let Tchish preach what he liked. All very fine for him to talk: he's a student, knows all about everything, has read so much . . . he'll live here for a time and then go away, and that's an end of it! Let him sit in the revenue office for five years and then talk about Humanity!

A fresh outburst of grief overwhelmed Ryskoff. Once again he saw the plumes of the hearse tossing in the breeze, heard the strains of music, the rattling of salvoes, and suddenly a pale, exalted face rose before him.

But at the same time it occurred to him that he was not an officer; at his funeral there would be no music and no salvoes, nor any other elevating procedure; it would all be different, pitiable and wretched as his whole life. Even in death there would be for him neither beauty nor grandeur.

Ryskoff was filled with such repulsion that he would have liked to lie down with his head in the swamp and turn to stone . . . suddenly he turned round and went home, his face drawn with pain and fury.

Possibly his decision was made at that very minute, and everything else that happened on that day and those following was only the consequence of that resolute determination, the last struggles of hatred and despair.

Kitchen smells assailed him as he entered the rooms, the odour of burnt onions and fat. Clouds of greasy, sickly steam rose from a wash-tub of dirty linen, and puddles of soapy water stood in the trodden-down hollows of the floor; his mother was laying the table with her long, yellow, bony hands, her sleeves turned up. She cast an angry glance at her son.

"Well, have you been to the chief?"

Something gripped Ryskoff's throat.

"I've not been, and I shan't go! The devil take him!" he answered rudely, trying to pass.

His mother thrust the plate aside and stared at him dully.

"What's the matter with you? Have you gone mad? You'll be dismissed, you fool!"

Ryskoff looked at her with detestation, and as though his

hatred opened his eyes, he suddenly saw clearly how dirty and cross and stupid she was, saw her sallow, withered cheeks, the greasy hem of her dress and her greedy, fatuous eyes.

"Upon my word, she's exactly like a pike," flashed across his mind.

"All right, I'll go! Leave me alone. It's sickening!" he said, hardly able to control the frenzied emotion that surged in his breast.

"Sickening. . . . Oh, indeed. . . . And it is for me, too," cried the old woman, as though she were glad to be able to scold at her leisure.

Ryskoff shrugged his shoulders in silence and seated himself at the table.

For two minutes they ate, then the old woman put down her spoon and burst out sobbing. "If God would only let me die! . . . Do you think I have an easy time of it? I've nourished you, fed you up . . ."

"Now it's beginning!" muttered Ryskoff sullenly.

"What's beginning?" The old woman snapped up his words petulantly. "What's beginning? Am I your mother or not?"

Ryskoff tried to pay no attention to her, and continued to eat, bending low over his plate. But she did not stop, and went on:

"It's you I'm worrying about. If you're dismissed you'll die of hunger by the roadside. I've done everything, everything. Got you that situation . . . thought it would make a man of you, and, now, lo and behold, you're pulling faces. What, is it your place to pull faces? Noodle! . . . If only you had pity on your mother! I bore you, and fed you, and brought you up . . ." lamented the old woman with dull monotony.

Suddenly Ryskoff flung down his spoon and sprang to his feet.

"And who asked you to?" he cried wildly. "Just think, what a favour you did me! You brought me into the world! Good. You only gave me a life that nobody asked you for . . . oh, curse you! Parents! . . ."

He clenched his fists, his throat rattled his eyes were a stare, and he suddenly rushed out of the room.

The old woman, turning pale with fright, looked after him gaping. It was a long time before she came to herself, and she sat motionless, as though not realizing what had happened. Then her long, sallow face puckered up and great tears rolled over her wrinkles.

"That—to his mother. He cursed his own mother! My God!" she groaned, and wrung her hands.

Ryskoff had slammed the door behind him, and was running from one corner of his little room to the other. He was trembling all over, almost choking, continuing to threaten some one with his fist.

And as he tore through the room his eye fell on the blue exercise-book. For a minute he looked dully at it and read mechanically :

"Love, a story by Alexander Ryskoff. . . . Love, a story by Alexander . . ."

Suddenly he rushed up to it, seized it, tore it to pieces, crumpled it up, and threw it against the wall ; the white and blue pages flew all about the room. When at last he regained possession of himself, he sank on to a chair by the window and gazed out despairingly at the dreary marsh that lay beyond the dirty panes.

He sat thus for a long time. The tune of a popular song ran persistently in his head :

Here lies a poor maiden
Who died of consumption. . . .

"No, go to the devil—go to the devil!" he reiterated for the hundredth time, and tried to thrust the jingle from his thoughts, but the words returned again and again.

The desolate vegetable garden, in which single stalks of cut cabbages were prominent, could be seen from the window, and beyond it lay the white, cold lake. The duck was still fluttering hither and thither on the water.

While he gazed thus, his soul gradually became quiet and hopeless. The attack of furious excitement had passed, only weary, unobsured misery remained.

The twilight deepened.

Ryskoff heard a faint, plaintive moaning, as though somewhere near by a fly were lamenting, caught in a spider's web. He raised his head and listened.

"That's mother crying! . . ."

Some one seemed to approach him and throttle him.

"Oh!" groaned Ryskoff, closing his eyes and clutching his head with both hands.

But the Being did not hear, did not relax his hold. He continued to throttle him, as though he would never let him go, and all the time a thin, mournful sound rang in his ears:

Here lies a poor maiden
Who died of consumption. . . .

CHAPTER LIII

THE day was drawing to its close, and through the studio windows crept the sapphire twilight. For some time it had been impossible to distinguish the colours on the palette, but Michailov Nicolaievitch Dchenieff had not been conscious of it ; not till he put down his brush and chanced to look round did he suddenly see the mysterious twilight behind him, brooding in every corner.

He did not even know how many hours he had spent at his canvas, but as soon as he laid down the palette he felt that his back was aching and his feet trembling with fatigue.

He walked to the opposite corner and looked at the canvas, his eyes still glittering feverishly. He had often stepped back already to look at the picture, but while he was working at it his eye had been directed towards the colouring : he had felt that the background was not progressing well, that one or the other figure did not stand out in sufficiently sharp relief, or that the foreground should be intensified, but he had not surveyed the picture as a whole. Now that he had finished his day's work he felt for the first time as though he retreated mentally and considered the general effect.

Darkness surrounded him. The studies on the walls had lost their tints, the motives were blurred and strangely distorted : instead of landscapes the splashes of colour assumed the forms of twisted bodies and misshapen horrible faces. Only on the large canvas of the new picture a dim light fell from the window, so that it loomed almost formidably out of the darkness.

Michailov stood erect, his fingers moving with a strained eagerness, as though he were still working. .

As usual with him, the picture had risen unexpectedly from a secret recess of his soul. At first he had made a sketch of a *chambre séparée* of a very smart restaurant, with bottles in iced water, dessert plates and glasses all in disorder. The faint light of the first dawn crept through the muslin curtains

of the windows, and in the arm-chair lay the body of a suicide, his arms hanging helplessly at his side. Several times he had made almost mechanical alterations, changed the position of the corpse, moved the furniture to and fro, as though he himself had the entire management of this strange room, filled with the silence and immobility of a frightful, mysterious death. But suddenly he had an inspiration, vague figures stood out in clear relief, and his whole being was harrowed by that excruciating mental agitation which he knew so well, at once loving and fearing it because it was accompanied by the almost unendurable joys and sorrows of eternal discontent.

Michailov had thrown his sketch aside, fetched out a large canvas and a wedge-frame in feverish haste, begun to look for nails, hammer, and pincers, in a state of inexplicable excitement, of morbidly provoked impatience. It was a torment to him that he could not begin at once, because the nails had been mislaid, the canvas would not stretch, and the wedge-frame was warped. Then, after the canvas had been spanned, he discovered that he had not enough colours on his palette. Michailov began to squeeze them out lavishly, just as they came, while at the same time he collected his brushes and flung away the empty tubes with something like loathing. He had a constant sensation that he would not finish it in time, that every minute something precious was squandered, and he could hardly tolerate the morbid irritation any longer.

At length everything was in order, the smooth elastic canvas stretched almost across the studio. Michailov seized his palette and a great sheaf of brushes, stood motionless before the canvas for several minutes, as though he saw something invisible on it, and suddenly made a broad stroke across it with his brush. . . . A badly-made wedge was shaken out and the frame sank backwards. . . . He had to put down his palette and begin all over again. Michailov could have sobbed with rage and impatience.

And then all at once all consciousness of time was lost in this terrible effort of the soul.

His teeth clenched, he covered the canvas with broad soft strokes, indicating the figures, now with rich, clinging splashes, now with blurred, dim shadows on the background.

He worked-up nothing, he did not make rough sketches, he went from one end of the canvas to the other, turned round again . . . the canvas swayed and trembled, the empty house was silent.

This was no longer the Michailov who laughed and drank and talked, the entire force of his soul was concentrated in his eyes, now closed, now wide open, flashing with many lights. He scarcely remembered what had suggested the theme of the picture, he forgot Krause, forgot the spectral, monstrous phantasies which the crazy engineer's effusions had evoked in him, forgot Lisa's terrified glances, Genitchka's sweet face, all the women he knew. Only a vague connecting thread remained, entwined itself into an immense skein and was slowly projected into the portentous, illusive figures of his picture.

His handsome face grew pale and wan, his eyes gleamed, he was continually obliged to moisten his lips, unnaturally dry with emotion.

Not till noon of the next day did he step back from the picture and look round for something to eat, without putting down his palette ; he ate so mechanically that he did not even observe the interruption. Then, throwing the fragments on to the table, he again seized his brushes, painted in a shadow, made a long stroke, intensified some high lights on the edge of a wine-glass, and continued his work till the evening.

As he stepped aside for the last time, and, sighing deeply, laid down his palette, he suddenly came to himself.

The whole picture was flooded in grey morning light, which cast pearly patches on the tablecloth and glided over the pale human face that lay rigid and helpless in the arm-chair by the table. The suicide is a young man, worn out by excesses. . . . The blood flows slowly down his pallid cheeks and soils the collar and facings of the smart coat. . . . The revolver lies on the floor, the thin, feeble hand has sunk down. . . . And the whole room, silent and deathly, is full of women. . . . They fade away in the mist, like phantoms created by this bluish, bloodless dawn. Their distorted faces, full of passion and hatred, cold or pleading, are all turned towards the corpse. . . . They are weeping, imploring, threatening, cursing, these white,

spectral women, formed by the memories of a wasted life and the grey-blue mist of a sickly daybreak.

If any one had asked Michailov what his picture represented, he would not have been able to explain. It was his devastated soul, his whole life which was drawing to a fateful, terrible close. All his longing, his passionate desire for some brilliant good fortune, his utter despair, Krause's death, Lisa, Nelly, Genitchka, Naumoff's wild talk—all was merged in an outburst of anguish and a last creation of genius.

Michailov stood motionless before his picture, till the deepening twilight obscured everything. Then he sighed, went to the divan and sat down, closing his eyes.

In a moment the strain, which had kept him on his feet all day, yielded to a pleasant weariness which enfolded his whole body. He threw himself back among the cushions, letting his hands droop listlessly. The last glow of the fading day fell on his pale face so that it resembled that of the dead man in the picture.

Michailov suddenly realized that he had seen nobody all day, and had not heard a living voice. No one had thought of him, no one had come; nobody cared what his plans were or what he had painted.

They are far away who will look at his picture when it is exhibited among a hundred others; they will praise it enthusiastically or blame it cruelly; some of those who look may possibly grow thoughtful; but now they are occupied with themselves and their own lives where there is no room for him. He must live alone and offer them the child of his soul, born in anguish and doubt, that they may trample it underfoot or set it upon a pedestal.

Suddenly he recollect ed how a young author, also much addicted to self-torment, had once said to him:

"Yesterday I went to the window and looked down at the street. I live high up, on the fourth storey. . . . Well, I was looking down, it was one of those strangely colourless days when the sky is low and clear, and yet you cannot see the sun behind the even white clouds . . . only a dry wind . . . it's autumn. The wind had swept the pavements, as in preparation for some festive occasion,—in a mood of exaltation and even of delight,—but now, when everything's

ready, all tidy, and no more to do, then it suddenly seems empty, uninteresting, one is bored because it's a holiday. Well, as I was gazing down, thinking it over—how festive and neat it was, how pale everything looked, the houses and the pavement and the sky . . . I felt more than thought that I should preserve these impressions in my soul, half unconsciously, yet at the same time with a clear realization that they could be of use to me. It doesn't do to forget to bring in at an appropriate place how the hero looked down at the street, how empty it was, and so forth. . . . I am acutely conscious of this, and recognize at once what I feel. At the same moment Tchekov's Trigovin occurs to me, with a certain sensation of discomfort : where he says in one passage, that when he sees a cloud that's like a piano, he always wonders at once whether he can utilize this image in some story : 'A cloud like a piano sailed past.' I remembered this, and with positive dislike I argued with myself that Trigovin was merely a product of the imagination, and that in reality an author need not think about such things. Just afterwards I discovered that I was thinking one actually does adopt that process and no other ; for instance, the pale light and the clean pavement, and that I was looking down from the fourth storey, and what I thought about the festivity, and then that I meant to make use of it, and that Tchekov had created Trigovin, and so on, the whole range of my thoughts and feelings in detail, even the unconscious ones—and that I wanted to store it up in my memory and put it to a poetical use. That sickened me. I understood that those were my most intimate experiences, my naked soul. And now I collect all that—my feelings, sufferings, doubts, yes, even my sincerity, and keep it that I may boast of real pearls. I demand approbation for these noble sentiments, these harrowing experiences, this deep sincerity. It's vile, superficial, absurd, and foolish, yet I cannot do otherwise ! It's the same with the best artists, the most earnest thinkers, and the most ardent poets. But for that there would have been no art ! For an experience is already complete when it has been undergone. There is no necessity to materialize it, for even the greatest idea is not dependent on outward form ; because if it has lived in me, then it exists for myself,

even if no other soul knows about it. But to expose one's soul to the world, to take care that it is universally recognized, and treasured, and sought after, that reduces us all to the level of poseurs or artisans, if not to prostitutes. Yes, really—to prostitutes, for we only do it to buy the justification of our lives by the exploitation of our feelings!"

Michailov had been interested at the time, but he had not quite understood what the author really meant; and, as a matter of fact, he had expressed himself somewhat incoherently.

But now, in the dead silence of this twilight and solitude, he suddenly remembered the conversation and was overcome by a morbid, stinging repulsion. He felt an impulse to leap up, seize a knife, and slit his picture from top to bottom. The temptation was very powerful, but at the same moment he felt that he would never have forgiven himself for murdering the picture . . . that particular word formed itself in Michailov's consciousness: murdered—as though his work were a living creature.

He felt depressed; he longed for intimacy with some one to whom he could tell everything without having to fear misunderstanding.

Once again a fresh face with black eyebrows and dark flashing eyes flitted across his vision, and with a sharp pang of sorrow he remembered the room at the Moscow hotel, the disordered bed, the naked form, the poignant, almost cruel voluptuousness . . .

Lisa?

He had almost turned her away, but that didn't matter . . . he could compensate for that! But at once he felt that compensation would be useless in this case.

Poor, funny little girl! Could he be content with her love? And wherewith should he return it, now that his heart was empty and powerless?

Perhaps it was all his own fault for not knowing how to select one who would completely fill his life? He had dissipated himself indiscriminately. Yes, indeed! There's no choice: every human being is a mystery, and the life of every mediocrity and clown is just as impenetrable and inexhaustible as that of the greatest thinkers and the loveliest of women!

There was a gentle and at the same time resolute knock at the door. Michailov raised his head and with instinctive uneasiness and a beating heart he cried : " Yes, come in ! "

The door was opened softly, and a graceful black shadow slipped into the darkness of the room, and stood still in the gloom like a spectre. Michailov sprang to his feet.

" Who's there ? " he called.

And suddenly he recognized the fine knitted brows and the sad, threatening look in the large dark eyes.

" Nelly ! " he cried.

" Yes," answered Nelly seriously as she advanced into the middle of the room.

CHAPTER LIV

MICHAILOV NICOLAIEVITCH DCHENIEFF stepped back slowly, stirred to the depths of his soul. " You ? "

Nelly was silent.

She looked long at him, and in her deep eyes there was a quiver which suggested two black noxious leeches. And suddenly she began abruptly and disagreeably :

" I haven't come to . . . Do strike a light ! Why do you sit in the dark ? "

Michailov hastened to light the lamp ; he felt, as his heart began to beat in joyful excitement, that suddenly after a long absence the one who was dearest to him had come in and he was beside himself with delight.

While he was lighting the lamp and hurrying about, Nelly stood in the middle of the studio, looking round as though to convince herself that everything was just as she had left it.

At last Michailov had finished with the lamp, which flamed up and brightly illuminated the whole studio.

" Is it really you ? Now, take off your coat . . . and hat. . . . I'm very glad you've come ! " murmured Michailov, who did not know himself what was passing within him, and only felt that something bright and pure suddenly irradiated his soul.

He almost called her " Dearest " when he grasped her thin strong hand.

Nelly freed it with an imperceptible movement, a shadow flitted between her frowning eyebrows, as though she had expected something else and was now hesitating whether to carry out her cruel decision.

Michailov noticed nothing. He ran to and fro, helped her to take off her hat, coat, and gloves, and smiled gaily, so that his handsome, manly face suddenly looked as lovable and truthful as a child's.

Nelly gave him her hat and coat and looked round the room, without moving from the spot.

" It's a long time since I was here ! " she said with pensive melancholy.

These words were a grievous thrust in Michailov's heart. He suddenly realized the unseemliness of his blustering joy. But against his will he fixed his eyes on her in rapture. She was exactly as she used to be : very slight and demure, with pale thin hands, a black dress, her brown throat bare and her hair somewhat dishevelled.

" But how did you get here ? " he asked, almost trembling with emotion.

" Oh, I just came," replied Nelly indifferently.

Michailov looked at her with wide-open, shining eyes ; she seemed so near, so precious, that he would have liked to embrace her tenderly.

As though conscious of this, she moved and began to stray about the room.

" Show me what you've been doing all this time . . . everything ! " she said inexorably.

But this severity, far from alarming Michailov, almost touched him. He took the lamp, raised it high above his head, so that its light fell on the sketches.

She gazed in silence at the pictures and studies with a look of such deep concentration it seemed to ask whether he had worked in her absence and not wasted the freedom which she had given him.

" That's good ! " she said twice, and Michailov was surprised at the pleasure her praise gave him.

Nelly stood before the large picture, which looked still more ghostly in the intense radiance of the lamp. She moved her delicate eyebrows, as though making an effort to understand it.

" What's that ? " she asked at last.

Michailov made no reply, for something suddenly terrified him.

Nelly looked at it long in silence, then she shook her head strangely, as though to banish a weight from her mind. And this slight movement showed Michailov that she had quite understood it, even the ideas which he had only felt and been powerless to express in the picture. Her face grew sad.

" That's very good ! " she said abruptly, and after a short pause she added : " But frightful ! "

Michailov still looked at his picture by the light of the raised lamp ; something new, that he had not seen before, suddenly affected him deeply. He even forgot Nelly at that moment.

But she went on quickly, and Michailov followed her, controlling himself again. She stepped behind the curtain where his bedroom was, and looked round with an inscrutable expression at the well-known objects—the bed, tables with books, the chair.

Michailov was sorry that she should see it. . . . Not on his own account, but to spare her feelings : Lisa, Genitchka . . . as if they were all to appear suddenly in the room where she had once surrendered to him. A feeling of deep abhorrence, of shame, and almost of despair assailed Michailov. He even made a motion to lead Nelly from the room. But she went of her own accord. Her expression had not changed, only a shadow slipped down between her eyebrows and concealed itself in the contracted corners of her mouth.

Suddenly she smiled.

It was a curious smile—of sorrow, remembrance, endearment and accusation, pardon and something else which he did not understand, but which sent a chill through his soul.

"That's all right ! " she said, as though answering herself, and suddenly she clasped his head with a sudden movement of both hands and kissed his forehead. Michailov started and put his arm round her, almost dropping the lamp.

With the same inflexible, mysterious look she pressed his head slightly back and kissed his forehead, eyes, and lips.

Her lips were dry and hot, and as they clung to his own Michailov felt her moist cold teeth. His head swam. But before he regained control of himself Nelly pushed him away, looked at him almost with loathing, and said in a tortured voice :

"Now, that's enough ! "

She took her black hat and arranged it on her tousled dark hair.

Michailov, who had put down the lamp and was standing in the middle of the room, felt as though the floor were moving gently under his feet, and smiled blissfully, without realizing why she was putting on her hat and coat. .

" You don't want to go yet ? " he asked.

Nelly looked round.

" I'm going ! " she said, her lips compressed to hold a hat-pin.

" But that's impossible. . . . I was so pleased ! Why did you come, then ? " Michailov stepped towards her, still dazed and bewildered, and turning pale.

Nelly's hands drooped. And now he understood the expression in her eyes : in them was a light of cruel, almost voluptuous revenge. Only at the corners of her mouth were sharp lines of suffering, but he did not notice these.

" How do you mean, why ? " said Nelly, overdoing her surprise. " So that we should meet again ! . . . We're old friends, aren't we. . . . Yes, more than friends ! "

" Nelly ! " cried Michailov desperately. " Why did you kiss me just now ? " he asked.

Nelly smiled enigmatically.

" Because I wanted to say good-bye to you. . . . I am going away to-day ; for good. . . ."

" Where to ? " cried Michailov, still more desperately.

" To Arbusoff . . . to the factory ! " answered Nelly harshly and abruptly, and the expression of consummate revenge in her eyes became yet more cruel. " Yes . . . and I wanted to tell you a piece of news. . . . Listen, I mean to be the first to tell you. . . ." Nelly stood still, as though she took a special pleasure in the slow pronunciation of each word. Her eyes flashed, like those of an animal before its last leap.

" What sort of news ? Why—the first ? " he asked.

Slowly and precisely, without taking her eyes from his face, Nelly said :

" Your Lisa . . . she drowned herself to-day ! "

Michailov staggered back. It was as though a mist enfolded him through which her black vindictive eyes gleamed in the distance.

Nelly turned round quickly and ran from the room. She stood for a moment on the steps, listening for some sound, and then hurried across the courtyard to the dark street, where the lamps shone at intervals.

CHAPTER LV

ARBUSOFF was waiting for Nelly in the house where Maria had lived and died.

After the actress's death her cousin, a jovial little actor, incredibly perfumed, with a carnation in his buttonhole, had come to the place. It appeared that the dead woman had written to him about Nelly, and begged him to let her stay on in the house. The little man had been delighted, as he had no idea what to do with it, had danced attendance on Nelly, stayed three days, and then gone away again. Nelly remained in her room, the rest of the house being shut up.

Nelly's room seemed strange amid the rest of the empty, dead house. In the evenings the wind sighed through the dilapidated garden, and the old house sank into damp, whispering darkness ; only in Nelly's window a light shone, moving the passers-by to superstitious fears.

Arbusoff was sitting at the table, on which one hand rested, and his heavy wide-browed head with the black tuft of hair that fell across his forehead was bowed. From time to time he raised his dark blood-shot eyes and his glance moved uneasily about the room, as though he were listening to the silence of the dead house. Then he hung his head again and sat motionless, almost imperceptibly drumming against his knee with the fingers of his other hand.

The candle on the table burned in a yellow flame and gave little illumination. In the twilight the dark chairs, the chest of drawers, and Nelly's narrow bed with its clean white quilt stood out clearly. Everything was clean and scrupulously neat, and bore the seal of ascetic severity ; except for the small looking-glass on the chest of drawers there was no sign that a pretty young woman lived here, one who had experienced a storm of passions, a disappointed, shattered love, pregnancy and a premature confinement.

The door which led to the uninhabited part of the house

was nailed up and a table and chair placed before it. It was just there that Arbusoff sat. He listened to the mysterious, weird sounds which flitted past him : sometimes there was a cautious creaking, as though some one came close up to the door on tip-toe, then again a sharp shrill crack. The wind rustled outside the windows, alternately soft and tempestuous, later on the rain began to stream down monotonously, occasionally lashing against the shutters.

Arbusoff was quite sober, well brushed and washed. His cap and coat lay on a chair near the door ; he was wearing a red silk shirt. The candle on the table, the bowed head, the listlessly drooping hand and the red shirt combined to produce the impression of a bold robber of Ivan the Cruel's time, meditating how he should go to judgment and execution next morning. Now and then he shook his head ferociously and smiled bitterly, as though in self-derision.

Suddenly the little gate was opened and light quick steps were heard on the stairs. Arbusoff raised his head quickly, his eyes sparkling. Anyone seeing him at that minute would not have comprehended the terrible ominous expression which flashed into those black eyes, inflamed with perpetual drinking.

The door opened and Nelly came in.

"Ah, at last ! " Arbusoff smiled in embarrassment.

Nelly took off her hat and jacket in silence. Either she had not heard him, or she attached no importance to the tone in which Arbusoff spoke.

"Now, that's over . . ." she said in an undertone.

It was not clear whether she was replying to her own thoughts or whether she wished to soothe Arbusoff. Her words might have conveyed either : "That's the end, the last link is snapped, everything's over . . ." or : "Now, you see that's all, you need not have been uneasy."

Arbusoff looked at her suspiciously.

"Really over ? " he asked, his lips contorted.

Nelly frowned, but did not answer.

"Very well. Listen, Nelly," began Arbusoff after a short pause. "I have kept my word, and not interfered with you in any way . . . but while I was sitting here alone, I thought over a great many things and . . . listen . . . I can't believe it ! "

Nelly looked at him without a word.

"I can't!" repeated Arbusoff.

"Well, don't believe it then!" she answered harshly.

Arbusoff raised his head.

"Oh, it's all the same to you, then? There . . . that means I was right!"

Nelly shrugged her shoulders. "Perhaps!"

"Nelly, don't jest," he cried wildly, but restrained himself at once. "You must understand me. I said nothing to you when you went. . . . It would have been too absurd, too humiliating to have spoken. But now I say to you what you said yourself. I know one thing, that you still love him!"

"No!" replied Nelly.

"You love him! Just as you used to, and perhaps more than ever!"

"No, I don't!" repeated Nelly obstinately and angrily. Arbusoff laughed hoarsely.

"You try to persuade yourself . . . but it's useless. You didn't only go to him to act a tragedy? Not only for effect? You love him, and that's all about it. Somebody once said to me that a woman never forgets the first man to whom she gives herself for love. And even if she hated him and wished him all manner of evil, and would even kill him—he need only raise his little finger and she runs to him at once. I can see that myself."

Nelly was silent.

"Well, was it a very affecting farewell?" he asked, with a tortured smile.

Nelly looked round quickly. "Yes, very," she replied.

"I see, you're jeering at me, Nelly," he said, convulsively moistening his lips and trying to smile contemptuously. "No doubt you were convinced that you purposely spoke in a tone of hatred, but in reality it must have been pathetic. Anyone can see that!"

"Oh, they can, can they?" asked Nelly, closing her eyes and laughing at him. "Well, all the better!"

Arbusoff choked with rage.

"Perhaps you gave yourself to him as a parting present? Just for the last time?" he cried, although he could scarcely endure his own words.

"Oh, yes, of course I did!" answered Nelly defiantly.

A mist rose before Arbusoff's eyes; Nelly thought he would throw himself upon her the next moment. He made a movement to do so. But all the time he knew quite well that she was only talking in that way out of spite, because his taunts and suspicions had angered her. The very fact that she, who had really been seduced by Michailov once, could bring herself to say such a thing, even on purpose and out of spite, maddened him. "Nelly, don't torture me! . . ." he groaned. "I don't believe it. . . . I know you talk like that on purpose . . . but I can't bear it, I can't!"

Nelly laughed, threw her hat on to the chest of drawers, and went up to him.

"Now, it's enough . . . stop!" she whispered, and drawing Arbusoff's head down she pressed it against her breast, gently and tenderly stroking his wavy hair. "It's you I love . . . dear one!"

An overflowing frenzy of happiness almost strangled Arbusoff. He clung to her girlish breast, beneath which he could hear the faint beating of her heart. "I've suffered such tortures . . ." he murmured, "why did you go to him?"

A jealous note crept into his whisper again; Nelly withdrew her hand and recoiled slightly. Arbusoff raised his head and once more looked at her suspiciously.

"It's obvious that you haven't quite forgotten him. . . ."

Nelly thrust him suddenly away from her and wrung her hands.

"Oh, how boring, how repellent it all is! How I do detest it all!" she moaned.

"Nelly, Nellitchka!" Arbusoff, terrified and repentant, tried to draw her to him.

But Nelly had already stepped aside. Her brows were sharply contracted, her eyes looked resolute and sinister.

"Listen, Sachar Maximitch," she began in a strangely broken voice, "do you mean to torment me much longer?"

"I? you . . . Nelly!" cried Arbusoff reproachfully.

"Yes, you, me!" she imitated him. "What do you want with me? Well . . . I loved you, then I stopped loving you . . . thought I'd stopped loving you . . . was

unfaithful to you . . . now I love you again. . . . Well ? But apart from that. . . . Every human being, Sachar Maximitch, has his profound secrets, which he himself does not know and does not understand. It was absolutely essential for me to see him. Only just to convince myself that I didn't love him. Why do you look at me like that ? . . . Well, perhaps I'm horrid, dissolute, bad . . . perhaps I don't understand myself . . . very good ; but what right have you to demand that I should be otherwise ? . . . I don't deceive you, don't pretend to be different ! . . . Why do you hurt me ? "

" Nelly ! "

" What—Nelly ! You shall believe me when I say it's over ! . . . How am I to prove it ? . . . You shall believe it, because I didn't come back to you. . . . I didn't ask your forgiveness. I have been greatly at fault and sufficiently punished, but I have also enough pride not to go and ask your pardon, because I know that can't be forgiven. . . . I would go down on my knees, but what for ? . . . You never forget it and never can ! Do you remember how often you came to me, assured me that all was forgiven and forgotten, and then you nearly strangled me . . . there, on the floor. . . . Do you remember ? "

Arbusoff hung his head.

" I thought that would have been the end of it. . . . I thought I should die . . . but you came back. And now confess, Sachar Maximitch, you only came because you were certain the child would be born dead . . . didn't you ? . . . Otherwise you wouldn't have come ! "

Arbusoff made no reply. Nelly continued :

" There, you see ! " Nelly smiled. " Such a tangible reminder, you knew yourself, would have been intolerable. What sort of pardon is that, what sort of love ? "

" Perhaps I should have come ! "

Nelly looked quickly at him. " Yes, you would have come . . . it's possible. . . . I see that you would have come . . . but only to leave me again ! "

" I love you, Nelly ! " Arbusoff interrupted her in despair.

Nelly clenched her fingers till they cracked.

" I see you do, I see it . . . but yet it's better that we should part for ever ! "

" Nelly ! "

" Better, better, better. . . . You won't forget it, you can't forget it, and we shall cause one another endless torments ! "

" I will forget it, Nelly ! " murmured Arbusoff timidly.

" No. I said you couldn't have borne the tangible reminder, but perhaps just because it would have been so brutal you would have made it up with me sooner. No, little things will always remind you of it. I shan't be able to kiss you, or caress you more tenderly, because at every word and every gesture I shall know that you're thinking : ' That's just how she kissed him . . . what she called him.' Isn't that so ? Last night I suddenly felt so drawn towards you . . . passionately. . . . I lay on the bed and longed in anguish for you to be with me. . . . "

Nelly blushed. Arbusoff quickly bent towards her.

" Wait . . . I haven't finished yet. I thought in the night . . . I thought : ' It's all over now ; madness, nothing's happened. I love him alone, I want to belong only to him —body and soul ! That's how I shall caress him, and lay my head on his breast.' . . . "

Nelly's voice rang out passionate and tender like music. She even laid her hand on her small, soft breast. Arbusoff listened without averting his ravished gaze ; he feared lest the slightest movement might alarm her.

" But suddenly, as though I had been struck, I thought : ' Ah, but the more passionate I am, the more terrible it will be. . . . That he should imagine I've been the same before.' . . . It's true, isn't it ? Is it true ? "

" It is ! " answered Arbusoff dully, and got up.

Nelly's eyes flashed desperately.

" Well, perhaps you're right, Nelly ! " Arbusoff smiled confusedly and without looking at her. " You've analysed it all very carefully ! " he added suddenly in reawakened hatred. " The caresses and embraces. . . . Well, now, what can we do ? Separate definitely and finally, perhaps that would be the best ? "

" Yes ! " Nelly grew pale.

Arbusoff was silent.

" But if I . . . can't do that ? " he asked at length, hardly audibly.

Nelly made a gesture of incredulity.

" You can ! You only imagine you can't ! " she replied.

Arbusoff was silent again. Desperate obstinacy was in his morose face with the heavy white brow, across which shadows passed, as though a thousand thoughts, like clouds driven by the wind, were chasing behind it.

" I'll even tell you," added Nelly, who was growing perceptibly tired, " that you only imagine that because you haven't yet made me yours."

" Nelly ! " Arbusoff shook his head.

" And as soon as I yield to you, you will feel that you can do without me, very much so, indeed ! " she added. " You're all alike, say what you will, and all your feelings put together, oh, in the end are only—cravings ! "

Arbusoff did not reply immediately.

" Now listen, Nelly," he said slowly at length ; " you may be right. . . . It is true that I don't and can't forget it. I shall always think of it and picture it to myself. And how could it be otherwise, it's so natural : I give you my whole soul unreservedly, and to me my soul is worth a great deal. I am proud, Nelly,—even if I'm only a merchant's son and can't brag about my talents. . . . If he had loved you as I do, if it had only been a piece of folly on his part to cast you off . . . if he suffered under it, I would forget it ! Then we should have been quits. I give you my whole soul, I buy you with my whole life, and he does the same . . . well and good ! But that's not how matters stand in our case : I can't bear the thought that I should throw myself unconditionally at your feet, that for me you are—sacred ; whereas he took you as the pastime of an hour and then cast you aside like a useless rag. Is it true that he is my superior to that extent ? . . . And if we three should ever chance to meet, he'll be thinking in his soul—he won't dare to say it aloud, or, perhaps, he'll even do that : ' What a fool he is. He has given his whole life as the price for what I just took in passing and then flung away ! ' . . . I can't endure the thought ! Then I should kill him, and you and myself ! "

Arbusoff clutched his head with both hands and staggered. Suddenly he seized his hat and went to the door, then stood still again.

"Only always remember, Nelly, that I have loved you, do love you and always shall. I wouldn't leave you, but there, you love him, love him! That's what I see, and you won't deceive me in that. Is it nonsense what I'm saying? if I really believed you had given up caring for him, should I renounce you. You know I should not," he cried. "Why did you go to him? Tell me, please! I'm not a child! . . . You didn't go to take leave of him, but to see for the last time, to make quite sure that it was all over! That he hadn't changed his mind in the meantime! Whether he wouldn't have you back again after all! Don't tell lies. . . . You know yourself it's true! You may have thought something else, but that was the only idea in your soul. Very well then! Just tell me the truth for once: didn't you kiss him good-bye?"

Arbusoff's voice broke.

Nelly looked up appealingly, her lips moved, she pressed her thin white hands to her breast. She felt such a longing to go to him, to fall on her knees before him, and dared not do it.

"Oh . . . well, good-bye then! I shan't come again! At least not as long . . . as long as he's alive! . . . Good-bye!" He gave the door a tremendous kick, which sent it flying against the wall, and slammed it so violently that the whole house shook.

Nelly remained standing immovably for some time, looking at the door as though she hoped he would return. Then her head sank, tears ran down her pale face convulsed by grief, and the hands which had been clasped to her breast dropped wearily to her side.

CHAPTER LVI

THE little town was profoundly moved : on the very next day after Cornet Krause's funeral the revenue clerk Ryskoff, who had been dismissed from the office on account of his unexpectedly impudent refutation of charges made against him by the Treasurer, had hanged himself, and the day following it was announced that a small greengrocer on the outskirts of the town had shot himself with a gun, and the merchant Tregulova's daughter, Lisa, had drowned herself.

It had happened before that the peaceful silence of the drowsy little town had been suddenly broken by a single shot, and the inhabitants had discovered that some one whom nobody had noticed had thrown his life away. Then they had all crowded round the body of the suicide, stared with fearful curiosity at the dead face beneath whose stony mask a mystery seemed to lurk, wondered why nobody had foreseen such an end, and then soon forgot him.

But this epidemic of suicides which had broken out in the town and affected all classes of society stirred it to its depths. There was no end to the talk and discussion ; the whole town was in a ferment, and this time there was more than mere curioasity in the wild excitement.

The greengrocer's suicide on the outskirts of the town aroused very little interest, and was discussed principally at the market : he had been a hard drinker, and it was while in this condition that he had killed himself. He had, as a matter of fact, made a disturbance in a public-house the day before, shouting and brandishing his arms, cursing somebody else as well as himself, but no notice had been taken of this very ordinary scene.

Ryskoff's suicide, on the contrary, astonished every one. Nobody had expected such courage, such a tragic end from a revenue clerk. Self-destruction always commands a certain respect, the suicide is regarded as one specially singled out by the hand of Destiny, and now suddenly a little mediocre clerk with a colourless face and hair like

straw appeared in the rôle. It was positively insulting. But the circumstances of the case were taken into consideration in the town, and Ryskoff's death was immediately associated with that of Krause. People talked about the contagious character of suicide, agreed that the ceremonious funeral and general sympathy only encouraged other impressionable persons to take the same course, while some one even alluded to an epidemic, and thus the preposterous rumour arose that eighteen others had pledged each other to commit suicide. In was here that Naumoff's name was mentioned.

Nobody could give any special information, and, besides, it was obvious to them all that Naumoff, even if he had influenced Cornet Krause or Ryskoff, could have had absolutely nothing to do with the greengrocer in the suburb or Lissa Tregulova. However, they stubbornly persisted in speaking of him and even wished to draw the attention of the police to him.

Under the pressure of these rumours the district judge, greatly alarmed, went to see Naumoff, but the engineer was at the factory, and it was afterwards announced that he was away. At the town-office the district judge found only Arbusoff, horribly drunk, who listened to him sullenly and then said gruffly :

"Stuff and nonsense . . . go to the devil!"

The excitement in the town increased. An uneasy expectancy was in the air, and though the majority derided such fantastic prophecies, they were all secretly depressed.

The young people were the most keenly affected. Schoolboys and girls of the higher forms collected in groups, heatedly discussing the suicides. And it was thus that the fact was discovered that there were among them zealous adherents of Naumoff's theories, with which in some incomprehensible way they had become familiar.

The girls actually took flowers to the graves of Cornet Krause and Lisa Tregulova. Only poor Ryskoff's dreams were not realized: no one except his mother was present at his funeral, and he was buried in the most distant corner of the churchyard, near the drainage, and not only were flowers and the flourish of trumpets conspicuous by their absence, but almost the very priests themselves. Only the

student Tchish went to his grave, stood musing for two minutes or so, shrugged his shoulders, and walked away again indifferently.

The headmaster of the grammar school deemed it essential to give an address after morning prayers in the presence of the masters and the priest and of the whole school, demonstrating that suicide was an act of criminal cowardice, and warning his pupils to shun this sin against their country, the Tsar, and God. The pupils had listened attentively, but apparently quite unmoved. But the parents, in many cases, began to hide all weapons away from their children after this speech.

There was something remarkable in this universal disturbance : knowing, as they all did in the depths of their souls, how few were the attractions of life, people now feared that this one impetus would shatter the majestic fabric of centuries and cause them to fling away their lives in masses.

Lisa Tregulova and her unhappy love-affair were the principal subjects of conversation in the town. Everybody knew about it, and without meaning to do so they cast aspersions upon her grave. Many, no doubt, felt sincere pity for the girl, but there was something in the story which appealed to stronger feelings than those of compassion or resentment.

Every one was excited, and ran from house to house, astounded and aghast. The uneasiness increased, and the little town really began to resemble a man attacked by a disease whose origin is unknown and for which no remedy can be found.

CHAPTER LVII

IN the evening of the day Nelly had been to see Michailov Dchenieff for the last time old Dr. Arnoldi was sitting at home drinking tea.

The lamp only illuminated one side of the gleaming samovar, leaving the doctor's fat hands and the room shrouded in darkness. There were neither shutters nor curtains to the windows ; the cold blue evening peered through them, making the old bachelor's arrangements look more forlorn and neglected than ever.

The doctor stirred the big preserved cherries abstractedly with his teaspoon, watching them fall in heavy, ruby-coloured drops.

He spent whole evenings thus in utter solitude, staring at the same spot, his dull, formless thoughts rambling disconnectedly from one subject to another. They crept through his brain slothfully and sluggishly like clouds across a field.

After Maria Pavlovna's death he had suddenly aged and degenerated : his hair had turned quite grey, his lips drooped, his hands began to tremble perceptibly, even his clothes were neglected and dirty.

The bright flame which had leapt up so suddenly in his soul was quenched for ever, and now he lived on, aimless and despondent like a withered tree on the roadside, shaken by the wind.

And if sometimes there flashed across his vision the thin face with the sad eyes and pathetic smile which seemed to ask from far away : " You won't forget me, Doctor . . . dear Doctor ? . . ." he only started and blinked, as though anxious to sink back as soon as he could into his dead apathy.

His soul held neither hope nor rebellion nor despair. It did not even occur to him to dream of what his lot might now be had she not died. He had been accustomed to his shrinking loneliness for so long that it even afforded him a painful pleasure. It embittered him to be forced to think

and always to think, even though his thoughts seemed so dull and superfluous, and he could not cease from remembering everything, though the memories were full of sorrow.

"We've no will of our own even in that!" he said bitterly, and his thoughts absorbed him once more.

"It doesn't matter!" And these few words froze everything within him, as though a mist had crept over his soul.

The outbreak of tragedies had neither terrified nor surprised him. He adopted only one attitude towards everything that happened, that of having expected nothing else. Only the greengrocer's suicide, which had aroused the least sympathy among all others, for some reason awakened in him stronger feelings. Yet it was not so much the suicide itself which engrossed him as a word he had heard that day: "Drunkard," he thought, with curious animosity—"Drunkard? What made him a drunkard, nothing but a drunkard, if life's so beautiful that people have to persuade themselves that the true life is not here but somewhere yonder? Couldn't get on . . . why not? Perhaps he didn't want to. Strange . . . who doesn't want to get on in life? Couldn't he? Yes, that'll be it . . . he couldn't! How do they know what ambition may not have filled this drunken greengrocer's soul? They are satisfied with everything, just as it comes; he was not. Perhaps he desired no less than all the Tolstois and Napoleons, to be wise and great and strong, but some one had sent him into the world small and insignificant and stupid. Certainly, every one can't be talented or a genius,—but who has the right to demand of a person that he shall be reconciled to being a nonentity, and humbly gaze from a distance through some dark chink at the spoilt children of fortune, the great creative artists? Gaze and rejoice in their magnificence, while he himself is nothing at all! A drunkard. . . ."

"Yes!" he said aloud, as a drop fell from the raised spoon.

At that minute there was a sharp knock at the door. Dr. Arnoldi dropped his hand and turned round.

"Who's there? Come in!" he called deliberately.

The door was opened and Michailov appeared on the threshold.

He came in and sat down without a word of greeting

on the first chair he found near the table, just as he was, in his coat and hat. Dr. Arnoldi, who scanned him closely with his clever, sunken eyes, moved his chair towards him.

For some time Michailov sat silent, cowering and staring at the floor. No doubt he had already forgotten where he was. Dr. Arnoldi observed him narrowly.

Suddenly Michailov raised his head, encountered the doctor's gaze, and smiled at him bitterly. There was a rift, a break in this smile, which was like that of men who know their illness to be hopeless and look upon their fate as sealed.

"Well, what's your news?" gasped the fat doctor.
"Will you have some tea?"

Michailov apparently meant to make some remark, but this unexpectedly simple question embarrassed him. He only waved his hand.

"Yes," said Dr. Arnoldi without emphasis, "there we are."

Michailov threw himself back dejectedly, made several efforts to speak, but only succeeded in opening and shutting his mouth convulsively, as though the right words did not occur to him at the moment.

The doctor was sorry for him: he leaned forward and would have tapped Michailov's shoulder encouragingly, but the latter drew back petulantly. Dr. Arnoldi withdrew his hand, bit his lips, and sat still.

Michailov continued to gaze fixedly at the floor. The doctor gradually became uneasy and at length murmured:

"Now then, what's all this about? Really, you mustn't let your courage sink like that!"

Michailov was silent.

"It was certainly terrible, but what is to be done! You can't undo what's happened . . . and, in my opinion, it's not altogether your fault. . . ."

"You think not?" asked Michailov dully.

The doctor looked away without answering.

Suddenly Michailov gave a forced laugh, looking at him sneeringly, almost inimically.

"It seems to me, Doctor, you really do believe I take myself for a scoundrel and a murderer, and have come to you to repent and beat my breast? Please don't alarm yourself! Not in the least! . . ."

Michailov's lips began to quiver curiously.

"I repent of nothing, I don't think I'm a cad, and you're . . . and you're not to regard me as one."

Michailov suddenly jumped up, pulled off his hat, and hurled it down. He was trembling all over, white as chalk, and almost suffocating. The doctor hesitated for a moment whether to restrain him or not, but, realizing at once what was passing in his mind, he grew serious.

"Compose yourself, compose yourself!" he said impressively, in his professional manner.

"Now sit down . . . and keep calm!" he repeated firmly, and he got up, took him by the shoulders, and forced him on to a chair.

Michailov was quiet at once and looked up piteously at the old doctor, quite cowed.

"Doctor," he murmured faintly, as though beseeching him not to be angry, "I am so broken down! . . ."

"Well, yes, yes . . . that doesn't matter! That'll pass!" said the doctor, as though he heard and saw nothing. "We'd better drink some tea. Above all, be calm and pull yourself together. Things mustn't go on like this!"

Methodically he rinsed a glass, dried it with a tea-cloth which, like an old housekeeper, he carried over his shoulder, poured out the tea, at the same time pushing a saucer and the preserved cherries towards Michailov, then he sat down again in his usual place.

Michailov had already seized the glass, then he put it down again.

"Have you seen her, Doctor?" he asked faintly, with a terrible effort, his face convulsed.

Without answering, the doctor carefully folded up the tea-cloth.

"Yes; now, Doctor . . ." he asked again, "what . . . did she drown at once?"

The doctor looked at him in amazement, but Michailov had already forgotten his incoherent questions, and was wearily passing his hand over his forehead, as though exerting himself to recall something to his mind. Probably that was not the question he had meant to ask.

The doctor recollects that he had once seen a lunatic make a similar gesture after an irrelevant question, and he shook his head.

"But you know, Doctor . . . as a matter of fact it's a good thing she's dead," began Michailov again. "I've been thinking about it for a long time . . . that's to say, not that, but . . . it seems to me I'm going off my head. . . ."

"Drink some tea," said the fat doctor calmly, and again pushed the glass towards him.

"Do you think I'm really going mad, Doctor?" he asked suddenly, quite sensibly and quietly. "No, I mean it seriously! It was really the best thing Lisa could have done!"

The doctor looked at him in silence.

"What on earth are you looking at me like that for?" Michailov said angrily. "I'm speaking the truth. And I'm not at all sorry for her! It's true that I . . . but that's all the same! It's nothing to do with that, there's nothing terrible in that! Very well . . . then she would have lived another forty years, married somebody . . . it doesn't matter whom—the devil or the greatest genius—would have had any amount of children, or gone to the university and later on have cured peasants and old women. . . . Oh, how important and interesting it all is! But that's simply folly, Doctor! The most horrible and stupid part of the whole affair is just that there's nothing about it to regret. Nothing but futility and mediocrity, and it could not have been otherwise. Well, she's dead . . . if everybody were immortal and she had been the only one to die, then perhaps I should be sorry for her too . . . but as we all have to die! She a little sooner, we a little later, and that's all about it. But she may be a thousand times happier than you and I!" cried Michailov, so heatedly that the doctor might have been perpetually contradicting him.

But Dr. Arnoldi had been listening in silence, biting his drooping lips, and his fat, heavy face betrayed no sign of what he thought.

Michailov jumped up and walked from one end of the room to another.

"She at least was swallowed up at once, and I daresay she felt a certain satisfaction in flinging herself into the water because she thought herself a martyr. And why did Fate set her in my path? She needed somebody else, a

husband, a father . . . eternal love and so forth. I couldn't make myself different from what I am. . . ."

The doctor made no reply.

" Well, as far as I'm concerned, I may be a coarse, dissolute fellow and anything else you like, but what's to be done if I am like that and not different ? Some one created me as I am, and I won't correct his faults, if such they are. Why should I restrain and torment myself in order to complete some one's unsuccessful work ? Damn it all. . . . I didn't understand her love and I won't understand it. There's no such love in myself and never will be. I want a woman and only a woman, and I don't care if they all drown and hang themselves, I . . . "

Dr. Arnoldi sighed heavily and moved dejectedly on his chair.

" Well, you know, Doctor," began Michailov again, with obvious reserve, " perhaps I really did come to make excuses. As a matter of fact, I suppose it really is—terrible, dreadful, odious, and vile. . . . I don't know ! I am sorry for Lisa. When I heard of it, I thought my brain would have collapsed ! . . . What I have just said is the truth, I know that, but I know one thing and feel another. Here I am, talking, proving this and that, and the moment I remember that she is no longer alive, that I shall never see her again, that she died lonely and despised by everyone, it goes to my heart ! I can't bear it ! She was so young, naive, trustful . . . loved me so whole-heartedly and sincerely . . . I shall never forget her. . . . Sometimes I still think it's all only a bad dream . . . but it is the truth, the absolute truth ! I couldn't be alone any longer . . . and so I came running to you, that you might comfort me and take pity on me !" added Michailov with tortured energy.

" And do you know, Doctor, from whom I heard that Lisa had drowned herself ? " he asked suddenly.

Dr. Arnoldi looked questioningly at him.

" From Nelly ! She came to me on purpose to be the first to tell me this piece of news. That's how she expressed herself : this piece of news ! So she had her revenge on me, Doctor ! And we must do her justice, it was a clever revenge. She's crazy, Doctor ! Well, as far as that goes, we

are all mad, there's chaos in all our souls . . . do you know, as I came along to you just now, I thought the whole time of Krause. Why of Krause particularly ? . . . I thought neither of Lisa nor of Nelly. . . . You came into my head and Krause. Truly, I've been thinking about him incessantly lately."

The doctor raised his head and looked at him curiously.
Michailov laughed unnaturally.

"Don't be afraid, Doctor, I'm not likely to shoot myself. . . . People like me don't do that. Upon my word, when Nelly left me I thought at first I'd better make an end of myself and thus cut all my troubles at once. I even looked for the revolver, but then I threw it aside and went away. Perhaps if I hadn't gone I should really have shot myself. But no, scarcely ! It's not in my line ! Not because I'm a coward ; no, simply because one must come to some final decision, no matter what, before one shoots oneself ; but I understand nothing, nothing in myself. As a matter of fact I don't even know whether it's necessary or not. Krause knew that. . . . Lisa knew it. . . . She loved. Love betrayed her, and so she did not care to go on living. So simple and clear ! Probably one wants strong feelings to make an end of oneself, but I've nothing but filth in my soul. I daresay you think it's funny to hear all this from me, Doctor ? "

The doctor shrugged his shoulders.

"No, why should I . . ." he muttered indistinctly.

"There are such moments, Doctor. . . . If a man lives, lives and looks about him . . . and then suddenly terror seizes him. Really, every one who examines his life seriously ought to be horrified at the immense amount of uselessly squandered time, forgotten feelings, wasted powers ; at all the dust and dirt he has consumed. Well, and that's how I looked round. . . . I'd sometimes done that before, but something always distracted and confused me again . . . but now I think I've taken my last look round. . . ."

Michailov spoke quickly, incessantly, obviously under the stress of an emotion which tortured him and lacerated his whole soul.

"I wasn't always like that, Doctor. Once I saw everything with other eyes. But that's long ago. You see,

Doctor, there was a crisis in my life : when I was about nineteen or twenty years old. At that time I was still going to the university, and the doctors told me I had consumption, so that I was convinced I should die in a few months. I wasn't frightened, I adopted an almost ironical attitude towards everything, only I found it all uninteresting : for instance, if I had to do a sketch for a competition, I used to think—what the deuce is the good of that if I'm going to die after the exam.? I remember just at that time there were great preparations for a journey to Italy out of the bounty of some Mæcenas ; I didn't go . . . why should I ? I thought . . . Will it be easier to die because I've seen Rome ? . . . And it was the same with everything. I had begun to flirt with a girl, and I left off. Very well, I thought, she will fall in love with me, and what then ? . . . I must die all the same. Only for the first time I began to reflect about life and realized that, strictly speaking, every one was as ill as I was, even if he were stronger than Hercules. Some one has said that life itself is the most dangerous complaint, because it ends fatally in exactly a hundred per cent of the cases. . . . You can be cured of consumption, of plague, of leprosy, but of life—never. Of course that's a commonplace thought, but yet we never succeed in contemplating it unflinchingly. But I knew that I was going to die, and for me it was by no means a joke ! I remember that at that time I saw an unfinished portrait of Kramskoi, that he drew the day before his death, and this caused me many sleepless nights. . . . Always when I lay in the dark I thought : Perhaps I shall have time to finish this sketch, and perhaps even the next, but there'll be one that I shan't be able to complete. . . . I thought how ridiculous it was that artists should take such trouble only to use colours which don't darken in the course of time. That Leonardo da Vinci was grieved when he noticed that his "Last Supper" was beginning to deteriorate, that his work, however good it might be, must perish in a few hundred years. . . . And Leonardo himself was getting on for fifty then. . . . I thought them all positively insane. They themselves will come to an end much sooner than their pictures ! Ludicrous ! That the man himself decays in twenty years, that doesn't matter, but that the picture he has painted can only exist

two centuries instead of four, that's terrible ! What nonsense ! What would it matter if some devil were to steal all the pictures and books ? He would just have made a long nose at humanity with its 'eternal' art ! By God, that would be a joke. And so it is in reality. Gradually, slowly, imperceptibly Time steals one picture after another, structure after structure, civilization after civilization, continent after continent, planet after planet ! ”

Michailov smiled brokenly.

“ This idea of theft disconcerted me at the time : I was an impressionable boy, who could not distinguish between inferences and reality, as everybody else does, and as I thought it all out very thoroughly I felt such a void, such a collapse of all my ideals that I began to contemplate suicide. But I was too young, the instincts of life were too strong for me, and instead of dying I began to seek the justification of living in life itself.”

Michailov stood lost in thought. His face grew calmer, but its expression was still more sad. The intense emotion had passed, banished by vague regret.

“ Yes,” he began again, sitting down wearily at the table, “ I began to indulge in pleasures—because only pleasure is an end in itself—and for me it was certainly embodied in women, because, after all, the pleasures of love are more intense than any others.”

Dr. Arnoldi listened, his bowed head occasionally nodding in tired agreement.

“ At first I, too, sought love, the true, great, eternal love. At that time I firmly believed in this love, and when I thought I had found it, heavens, what bliss ! Even now, when I think of it I feel a grief that convulses my heart ! We understood one another so well, were so happy together, we hardly spoke or thought of anything else. Every meeting only strengthened my desire for her and her resolve to protect herself. That had become our one object ; it burned incessantly in our minds, obsessing and torturing us. I recollect that the very thought of it seemed a profanation to me, and I despised myself, but I could not help it. All our intellectual conversations, all our mutual plans and dreams, art and everything else centred in that one point. And after it had actually happened at

last I went out on to the quay in the early dawn. The morning was soft, bright, and pure, the sea boundless, and the stars glittered transparently above it. It was easy and pleasant to breathe, as though not only the air, but the very morning light itself filled one. And for her who had given me such happiness I felt such a tender, thankful devotion that I could have fallen on my knees before her and kissed the hem of her dress, like a saint's. She, my beloved, seemed so pure, as though she were woven from the rays of these pale stars of dawn. . . . And all the time I was trembling from the frenzied ecstasies of physical pleasure. But I didn't notice that, there was only happiness within me, and I did not analyse its cause. The thought would have been too terrible that all that was—only physical joy."

The doctor listened and nodded his head almost imperceptibly. And it was impossible to discern whether these pure memories of daybreak really made an impression upon him, or whether his head was merely trembling from the weakness of old age.

" Well, and so we lived together, and after a year we had had enough of it. We drifted so far apart that we became enemies ! It turned out that the great happiness of that morning was a moment which could never return. Very soon caresses became a habit, like any other home comfort, a diversion from boredom. And one couldn't run out into the street every time and invite the whole universe to celebrate with festivities an event which occurred daily ! Of course we still loved and were sorry for one another, but we were really only good friends, no longer lovers. Then we were thankful when a third person was with us, we began to quarrel, there was no end to the friction, and at last we separated altogether. It was a cruel parting. At first when I woke up at night I felt with an icy horror that she was no longer there, that she lived somewhere far away with others. And there was one thing I couldn't understand : If such a powerful feeling can disappear from one's life, then what won't disappear, what is significant, what is true ? . . . And in six months' time I found out that I could get on very well without her, slept as peacefully, ate well, flirted with other women . . . as though she had never

existed. And finally I forgot her altogether. Then I went from one woman to another, desiring only rapid change, the charm of many experiences. But that, too, was nothing but self-deception. Again the same unendurable, vague longing, the same sensation of void and futility filled my soul. I was simply bored with everything. I noticed that I approached women without enthusiasm, possessed them without joy, forsook them without discomfort. At first each fresh liaison had engrossed me for months, then for weeks, then for a few days, and finally—till the moment of possession. I had neither the patience nor the desire to conquer them gradually; resistance and hesitation only irritated me. I can't describe the abhorrence which sometimes filled me, so that I should have liked to shout as coarsely and cynically as possible to the purest, tenderest girl: 'Now then . . . what's all this about . . . it can only end in one way. I know every detail of it all. . . . I have heard the same words, seen the same caresses from ten women.' The rest was nothing but boredom, misery, and repulsion. My soul had grown desolate, I had dissipated my emotion on trivialities."

Michailov got up again and paced through the room.

"Tell me, Doctor, what inhuman folly or baseness invented the fairy-tale of love? They all describe it splendidly: till the moment when the lovers are at length united. Well, and what then? In the end Natasha Rostova's swaddling-clothes have yellow spots instead of green ones! And on the other hand lie the pleasures of free love, which approach the boredom of the brothel, the greater their variety. . . ."

Michailov went up to the doctor and looked into his face with blazing eyes.

"No, Doctor, if one no longer believes, no longer has anything to live for, then it's better not to live at all! Either one must believe in some crazy theory like Naumoff, or put an end to everything, like Krause!"

Michailov suddenly interrupted himself and asked wretchedly:

"I say, Doctor, what do we live for?"

"I don't know. . . ."

"But you yourself, why do you live?"

"I? I've simply grown tired. . . ."

"What?"

"I'm tired," repeated Dr. Arnoldi, and indeed such a deep, heartrending weariness was expressed by the gentle voice of the worn-out old man that Michailov all at once understood him.

"Yes, that's true. . . . A human being can grow so weary that he will go on and on and even forget to rest, till he falls down, never to rise again."

Suddenly the samovar began to boil, sang, gurgled for a moment, and was quiet.

"Listen, Doctor," began Michailov again, as though listening to some voice in his soul; "you are tired, I can understand that, but I'm not! Everything snaps and quivers in my brain, I feel as though I should like to seize the whole world and turn it upside down, but at the same moment I am incapable of living! That's not a phrase, Doctor, I really do feel that I've no firm ground under my feet, that nothing lies before me. I am sorry for nobody, Doctor, it doesn't matter to me that Lisa is dead, that Krause has shot himself, that somebody was hanged yesterday, but if somebody has toothache before my eyes I simply writhe in agony with him. My God, how I envy those dull socialists who believe in their programme and are firmly convinced that they only live in order to provide everybody with a fowl in their soup in the forty-second century! I envy Naumoff, who believes in his hatred. But there's nothing in my soul . . . do you understand? . . . nothing! I don't even understand how people can believe in anything! And I think, Doctor . . ."

"What?"

"I don't think anybody does believe in anything, either God, or the devil, or humanity, or in ideals of beauty and truth! And nobody cares for life, nobody loves Nature or mankind! All that's only the result of this dread of the end, of this desperate, insensate cowardice. And I . . . I'm just such a coward as every one else! Why should one perpetually deceive oneself?"

They heard some one run heavily up the stairs and knock at the door. Michailov broke off with a sigh, Dr. Arnoldi raised his head.

" Who's there ? " cried Michailov.

The door flew back against the wall, and a soldier, spattered with mud, rushed into the room.

" Come quickly, Doctor . . . an accident. . . . His Honour has cut his throat ! "

" Who ? " cried Michailov, suddenly recognizing Trenieff's orderly. " Trenieff ? Cut his throat ? How ? "

" With a razor ! " the soldier replied.

CHAPTER LVIII

THE day had begun for Trenieff exactly like a hundred others since he became an officer and married. He had got up very early, breakfasted alone in the cold, empty dining-room, ridden at once to the orderly-room, where he heard of Ryskoff's suicide, and finally gone to join the squadron.

He was not particularly astonished at Ryskoff's death : as a matter of fact, he despised the petty officials, school-masters, and everybody else who had not the honour of wearing uniform, to such an extent that it seemed quite natural to him that a fellow like Ryskoff should hang himself; if *he* had been doomed to such an existence, no doubt he would have done the same.

Krause's suicide was quite another matter. . . . When the first shock was over Trenieff pitied his good comrade from his heart, and was ready simply to regard him as not quite sane.

Yet the obvious connection between Krause's suicide and Ryskoff's, which was as apparent to Trenieff as to everybody else, caused him an unpleasant feeling of depression. He remembered the talk about the infectious nature of suicide, and it alarmed him. He could not help thinking of those moments during quarrels with his wife when he longed to put a bullet through his head, and the idea that such feelings might come back filled him with an abhorrent feeling of weakness.

It worried him so much that he cut short the inspection of his squadron, which he had intended to hold, left the sergeant in charge, and rode home.

At lunch he told his wife about Ryskoff, but it turned out that she knew already and entered into the conversation with such indifference that he soon dropped the subject. Still with the same uncomfortable sensation he lay down after lunch and went to sleep.

He awoke rather late, completely rested and quite

recovered, agreeably conscious in every limb of his healthy, refreshed body.

As he lay in bed he heard voices and the clatter of tea-things in the dining-room. A narrow ray of light fell through the chink of the door, making the dark, warm bedroom look specially comfortable.

Trenieff would have preferred not to get up. He stretched, yawned, and every muscle responded to the comfort of the soft pillows. But he was aroused by laughter from the dining-room. He dressed quickly, washed in cold water, and went into the dining-room, fresh and glowing from sleep and from his bath.

His wife was presiding over the samovar, and as he came in she was pouring out his tea, having heard the splashing from the bedroom and concluding that he must be coming. At the other end of the table was a smartly-dressed woman, the wife of the commander of the fifth squadron, who was talking in a sharp, clear voice.

Trenieff was inclined to flirt with this lady, who was reputed to be very responsive. When he saw her his spirits rose still higher ; he perfunctorily kissed the elbow of his wife's bare arm, which she purposely held high up with the teapot for some time, touched the visitor's hand with the tips of his moustache, and in his most cheerful mood took his accustomed place.

"Do you know what's happened ?" asked his wife excitedly.

"What ?"

"You know Lisa Tregulova ?"

"Oh, just slightly," said Trenieff thoughtfully, sipping his tea ; the pretty little face with the soft, fair hair and trustful grey eyes rose to his mind.

"She's drowned herself," ended his wife so hastily that she almost choked ; she was determined to stagger him with the news.

Involuntarily Trenieff put his glass down.

"But that's quite unbelievable . . . when ?" he asked.

"This afternoon, while you were asleep !"

"And a greengrocer in the suburb has shot himself !" the visitor hastened to add in the same tone of cheerful animation.

Trenieff shrugged his shoulders in perplexity.

"The devil knows what it's all about! . . . That really is . . . Well, but that chap, the artist, does he know about it?" he suddenly recollected Michailov.

"I suppose so. The whole town's talking about it . . . and do you know, it turns out now that she was *enceinte*."

Again Trenieff saw the fair-haired, bright-eyed little face.

"Poor girl!" he said.

"Why poor?" replied his wife contemptuously, shrugging her shoulders. "She knew what she was doing!"

"Well, but even so . . ."

"And I can't understand why they all throw themselves at that Michailov's head," observed the visitor. "I don't care for him at all. I can't stand those conceited, handsome men. . . ."

Trenieff remembered that she was said to have succumbed to Michailov herself at a regimental picnic two years before, in a state of slight intoxication, and he became somewhat embarrassed.

"Yes . . . but I do feel sorry for the girl! . . . There was absolutely no reason at all for her to die. . . . Now I can understand Ryskoff . . . who had nothing to eat. Krause . . . for the sake of a theory! But she? So young and pretty!"

A disagreeable shadow flitted across his wife's face.

"Ah, yes," she said sarcastically, "men always have compassion on pretty girls!"

Trenieff, knowing that she was jealous because he admired some one else, although she was dead, frowned irritably.

"What have men to do with it? It's simply pity that makes me sorry for her."

"Oh, yes, of course!" his wife pretended to agree with him, but without disguising the subtle irony of her tone.

The visitor smiled at Trenieff. She would have been glad to start a mild flirtation with him, and for this reason she always insinuated in her taunts that he was afraid of his wife.

Trenieff repeated excitedly: "Upon my word, I'm very sorry about it!"

"Well, yes. That's what I'm saying!" agreed his wife still more mockingly.

Trenieff tried to give another turn to the conversation.

"It's appalling! A positive epidemic! In my opinion they ought to take proper precautions."

"Yes, and have you heard," interrupted the visitor animatedly, "they say that Naumoff has inaugurated a Suicides' Club and eighteen more people have to shoot themselves before it comes to an end. I suppose he's quite interesting, this Naumoff?"

"As a human being or as a man?" Trenieff lapsed at once into a jesting manner.

The visitor laughed gaily and tossed her charming little head.

"Well, as a man!"

"He's not specially interesting to me! But he's an unusually clever fellow." Trenieff tried to assume a pompous expression.

"Oh, I shall have to begin a little romance with him!" laughed the lady. "A Suicides' Club! How interesting that is! He's a weird sort of man, I suppose?"

"Do you mean passionate?" laughed Trenieff ambiguously.

The lady threatened him with her finger.

"Now, now, now. . . ."

It suddenly occurred to Trenieff that he was indulging in unseemly levity in the presence of his wife, and he looked solemn.

"But joking apart . . . there's no doubt that Naumoff is very much involved in the affair. I'm sure there's no such thing as a Suicides' Club, that's nonsense, but he must have influenced Krause. . . ."

"They say you belong to the club too!" laughed the visitor.

"Rubbish!"

"He's more likely to belong to the Topers' Club!" remarked his wife, annoyed by the coquetry of her visitor and her husband's dalliance.

Trenieff was hurt, but he forced a laugh.

"Why shouldn't one drink in good company!"

"Very good company!" said his wife ironically.

"Well, and isn't it? Interesting people . . . Arbusoff—a noble nature. Michailov—certainly a gifted chap. Tchish

—a student. Naumoff. . . . Yes, it's quite interesting to be with them."

"Yes, that's how it is with you; the people you drink with are always interesting . . . especially after the tenth glass. Your Naumoff is nothing but a scoundrel, in my estimation."

"Why a scoundrel?"

"Because if one preaches that kind of thing, the first thing one ought to do is to shoot oneself, not always drag others into it."

Trenieff was at a loss: that was his opinion, too. But in spite of that he began to argue.

"You are funny, Klava! If an idea comes into a person's head must he . . ."

"I think so! Or else he ought not to talk. It's horrible! You see, Krause's shot himself, but he goes on living as though nothing had happened! I am only sorry I don't know him, or I should have told him openly. . . . Vile!"

"Absurd! He doesn't say every one must shoot himself. That's their own affair. He simply speaks about life in general. And I quite agree with him in thinking that life's senseless!"

"Indeed? How long have you felt like that?" asked his wife, taunting him. Her anger was increasing, though she did not know the cause of it.

"I've been quite of his opinion from the very beginning. One need only glance at one's own life to see that. What pleasure does one really derive from it? Always the same. Drill, soldiers . . . from one day to another."

"Oh, but not always only soldiers!" laughed the visitor, who was delightedly listening to the annoyance in her hostess's voice. "You have your wife and child."

"Well, what of it—wife and child!" answered Trenieff, who was carried away by the debate, although he could not have imagined his life without either. But he controlled himself again at once.

"I'm not speaking literally . . . but in general. One only lives to die, and as that's the case, once and for all, why live?"

"Well then, don't!" answered his wife, who could no longer restrain herself. His every word struck her like a

blow. She had given her whole life for him, never complaining, and he . . .

"Now, Klava," drawled Trenieff, "that's going rather too far."

"Oh, then please don't you go so far!"

"Are you offended?" said Trenieff with a forced smile.

"By you, do you suppose?" asked his wife through clenched teeth, casting a look of hatred at him.

The visitor saw that a quarrel was imminent, and got up to take her departure.

"You do say dreadful things," she said to Trenieff on leaving; "I shall be quite afraid of you now."

"Won't you even flirt a little with me?" asked Trenieff, uneasy about the quarrel, but doing his best to appear as calm and cheerful as before.

The visitor glanced involuntarily at his wife, but turned to him again at once, gaily threatening him with her finger. He saw that his wife had understood the visitor's look, and that her face was pale and miserable.

When the door closed behind the visitor, Trenieff tried to begin a conversation with his wife, and to raise her spirits he made a joke about their acquaintance. But she went back into the dining-room as though she had not heard, took a book, and sat down at the table. Just as Trenieff approached her the maid came in to clear away the tea-things. He walked up and down the room with every nerve quivering.

"I had a good sleep this afternoon!" he said at length simply, trying to avert a quarrel by distracting her with trivial conversation. "Have you been out anywhere to-day, Klava?"

His wife, whose eyes were fixed obstinately on the book, gave no answer; she put both hands up to her face, so that Trenieff could only see her hair and the tip of her nose. The maid was looking at him. Trenieff turned very red and walked through the room gnawing his moustache. The maid took an endlessly long time to clear away, wiped each spoon separately, rinsed the glasses noiselessly, and held them up to the light, one after the other. Trenieff would have liked to knock her down. The clinking of the glasses irritated him terribly. At last she put all the tea-things

away in the sideboard, swept the crumbs off the table, rearranged the disordered chairs and went out.

His wife did not raise her head. She went on reading, and at moments she really seemed to be interested in the book and no longer thinking of him. But something prevented Trenieff from approaching her: he felt that there could not be a reconciliation at once, and that the quarrel would break out again. He would have to abase himself once more, and ask to be forgiven like a boy who has been playing mischievous pranks. His pride rose within him.

"Why can't I bear to see her unhappy, why does her slightest caress make me forget every insult, while she goes on reading after a quarrel as though she didn't care for me in the least? Surely she can see how I suffer? The best way is—not to worry about her! That's just how I spoil her, by taking so much notice of her whims!"

After he had inhaled a few deep puffs of his cigarette he became somewhat calmer.

"It doesn't matter, it'll all come right again," he thought. "It isn't the first time!"

"Please don't smoke . . . I have a headache!" said his wife suddenly in so bitter a tone that he started.

Trenieff was furious: he smoked the whole day and she did not mind, but as soon as the most trivial difference of opinion arose, she at once said: "Don't smoke . . . headache!" . . . What rubbish! She hadn't got a headache! She said so out of spite, to corner him, to show her power over him!

"Don't talk like that, please! You haven't any headache at all. It's absurd! I want to smoke! Why should you object all of a sudden?"

She did not answer.

Trenieff felt the blood rise to his head.

"Don't behave so ridiculously . . ." he said unexpectedly to himself. And although he no longer wanted to smoke, he kept the cigarette in his mouth.

She got up noisily with a jerk, seized the book, and went into the bedroom without looking at him.

Trenieff remained standing in the middle of the room. He was seething inwardly. Here was a fine row in progress. And what about? Did he misunderstand her or she him?

Mechanically he flung the cigarette away, he regretted bitterly now that he had not done it before. But yet this perpetual tyranny enraged him.

"No, this must come to an end ! I shall go and tell her openly that . . ."

Trenieff went quickly to the door and tried to push it open. It was like a blow in the face to find it bolted.

Everything darkened before his eyes. "What is it ? . . . What is it ?" he murmured, hurrying round the room like a madman.

And how often it had happened before ! How often had he stood before that locked door like a boy.

At last he threw himself furiously against the door and rattled the handle. His wife made no sound.

"Klava, open the door ! What's all this nonsense about ? Open it, or I . . . open the door !" Trenieff, who no longer cared whether all the servants heard him or not, roared at the top of his voice and kicked the door with all his force.

The lock clicked. His wife had turned the key without taking the trouble to open the door. That was a fresh humiliation. Trenieff flung the door open and walked in, white with rage.

His wife, who was standing by the dressing-table, looked at him coldly with unfamiliar eyes.

"Now what do you want ?" she asked.

"You say that to me ? . . . Why did you lock yourself in ? . . . What's the meaning of it ? Why for God's sake do you always get so angry ! . . . It's perfectly dreadful !"

She turned away coldly and took up the book again.

"Now, tell me for goodness' sake . . . what is it you want with me ?" cried Trenieff.

She shrugged her shoulders without looking at him.

"And what do you want with me ?" she asked at length in a tone of hatred.

This sudden question confused Trenieff. For a minute he looked at her, gasping convulsively for air, his eyes starting from his head. She, however, began to read again placidly.

Suddenly Trenieff snatched the book away from her violently. She fell back terrified and turned pale.

"What manners . . . like a common servant's . . . give me back my book!" she said coldly.

Trenieff clasped the book convulsively to his breast; although he knew that he looked pitiful and absurd, he could not restrain himself.

"Fool!" she murmured through her teeth, forcing a laugh and walking towards the door.

The moment that she grasped the handle and he saw that she was going into the nursery, where she would be safe under the nursemaid's protection, in whose presence he would not dare to speak, Trenieff hurled the book away and overtook her, meaning to clasp her and draw her to him by main force. He wanted to subjugate her by the strength of his embrace, but instead of that, half-frenzied, he struck her on the back with his fist.

"O-oh!" she cried sharply, and fell backwards as though crushed, vainly stretching out her hands to save herself.

At the same moment the mist cleared from Trenieff's eyes.

"What have I done!" flashed through his horror-stricken brain.

Her face was blue and incredibly changed, the eyes started out with pain, and instead of a mouth, he saw a round black hole.

"I've killed her!"

"Klava, Klava, forgive me! . . . Forgive me! . . ." he cried and wept, trying to raise her by putting his arms round her.

Suddenly she twisted about like a cat, her face lost all human expression, her eyes grew round and dark, her mouth watered, and silently, her eyes piercing his, she clutched his hair with both hands, biting and scratching him, moaning piteously.

Trenieff thought he must go mad; he realized that this time something irremediable had happened, and that all was over for ever.

The idea darted across his mind that he could reach his razor in an instant, and at the same moment he saw it lying on the dressing-table.

Then a piercing shriek filled his ears. A sweet, wild feeling of revenge possessed him, and while he looked at his wife's outstretched hands and saw the look of terror in

her round, imploring eyes, he seized the razor and slashed his throat in a fury.

"There you are now . . . there!" shot through his head, but at the same moment he realized that what he had done was irrevocable, that this was—Death!

"Klavotshka, I didn't mean to . . . Klavotshka!" he thought he said, but in reality he only gurgled and sank slowly to the floor. Several trifles clattered down after him, small bottles and boxes which he dragged with him from the dressing-table.

He no longer understood why the legs of the chair should be so near his face, but he clasped them convulsively and made an effort to rise. He saw before him the petrified eyes of his wife, who was trying to close the frightful wound with her hands.

A yellowish black mist spread rapidly around him.

"Klavotshka!" he cried again in boundless despair, but it was no longer audible to the living, for it came from beyond the gate of death.

CHAPTER LIX

MICHAILOV did not notice whether it was raining or windy, whether he met any one or not as he ran home. He had only a vague impression of moisture, darkness, of lights flickering in the distance and noise. He felt like one whose life has been shattered by a great catastrophe ; he alone has escaped, shaken, half insane. At the same time everything seemed strangely colourless, shadowy, and unreal, full of pale, sick terror.

Not till he arrived at the steps of his house did he come to himself. Suddenly he stopped in amazement : through the chinks of the shutters he could see a light. Some one must be there.

His first thought was that it must be Nelly, and the thought moved him so much that he felt he dared not go on. He remained for some moments trying to collect his thoughts, to find out if he were wildly delighted or horrified at her return ; but his mind was in such confusion that he could not analyse his feelings clearly. He had the greatest difficulty in opening the door. The idea flashed momentarily into his mind that Nelly had come back to kill herself in his house. He had time to realize that he would go out of his mind if he should see her corpse. . . . Then, in unreasoning terror, he pushed open the door and rushed into the room.

The big studio was almost dark ; only one corner behind the large canvas was illuminated, and the huge shadow of a man, sitting there beside a small lamp, lay motionless on the wall and stretched across the ceiling.

For some reason Michailov crept very softly, almost on tip-toe, across the room and looked round the dark canvas into the bright corner. There lay his coloured draperies and various litter thrown together in a heap, and there also was the stool on which stood always a small kitchen-lamp, that was only lighted if he wanted to look for anything.

This small lamp was now burning with its narrow, smoky

glass, and near it, on another stool, sat a man in a red shirt, whose dark eyes were fixed morosely on Michailov.

"Arbusoff!" cried Michailov.

Arbusoff did not utter a word, did not even move, but continued to stare at him. Michailov was silent also. For some moments they looked at one another, and during this silence the mask of their usual relations slowly fell from them. Michailov knew that Arbusoff would not have come without some reason and that he had some project in mind.

Arbusoff's unexpected appearance came upon him like a last blow, finally crippling all power of criticising his actions. There was something brutal in Arbusoff's crouching attitude, and if Michailov had been capable of a thought at that minute he would have known that Arbusoff meant to kill him.

Michailov suddenly smiled faintly and asked :

"Have you been here long?"

Arbusoff made no reply, and continued to sit in the same attitude.

Michailov took a step forward. He felt that his terror was being transformed into a blind fury, like the reaction in presence of a poisonous reptile.

"What do you want?" he cried.

If Arbusoff had still been silent, Michailov would probably have rushed upon him and knocked him down. But Arbusoff answered :

"It's quite simple, I came to see you!" He still sat motionless.

"What for? Why?" asked Michailov, his fists still clenched and his whole body trembling.

"Oh . . . I'm curious!" answered Arbusoff.

"Go to the devil!" cried Michailov, in a burst of rage, and he raised his hand. He imagined now that Arbusoff had only come to jeer at him on account of Lisa's suicide.

"Careful!" said Arbusoff slowly and threateningly, without moving from his seat.

Michailov let his hand drop helplessly.

"Yes, that's better! A boxing-match with me wouldn't be very much to your advantage. Sit down instead, I should like a talk with you. Sit down!" he cried again with a sudden gesture.

The cry seemed to awaken something in Michailov's darkened soul: he stepped back, closed his eyes, tossed his haggard head, and smiled contemptuously.

"Don't shout like that! What should we have to discuss? You'd better go away, it would be more sensible!"

"More sensible?" returned Arbusoff, leaning forward craftily. "No, no, my friend! I don't bother any more about what's sensible. How long have you been so prudent? You should have thought about prudence sooner, but now it's too late. I shan't go away yet. . . . No, brother, you're rather too impudent!" he concluded maliciously, assuming a yet more careless attitude, which gave him the appearance of an intoxicated young tradesman, eager to brag. "I want to talk to you openly, as a friend . . . we've never really managed to do that before, and yet we are friends . . . aren't we?"

Michailov shrugged his shoulders indifferently.

"I've shown my common sense often enough, my friend! Often enough I've stood aside. Now it's time for you to do so, if only for once. What sort of person are you that everyone should give way to you? Just such another creature as all of us sinners."

He was mocking Michailov crudely, and as the latter noticed it his fury increased.

"Oh, you've come to make a scene, have you?" he said disgustedly. "But why so familiar? You're keeping too strictly to the conventions! You should rather start a brawl!"

"It looks to me as though you were going to do that," remarked Arbusoff; "and as for the conventions, how should it be otherwise? I'm only a tradesman's son. You must take me as I am."

"Oh, well, I don't mind," answered Michailov, taking a chair and sitting down opposite Arbusoff. "Go on, I'm listening. What do you want to say to me?"

"I don't want to say anything yet, my friend." Arbusoff broke into cunning laughter. "Besides, I don't mean to talk about myself, but about you!"

"Well, I don't care!" repeated Michailov, shrugging his shoulders.

Arbusoff stared at him again.

"I wanted to ask you," he began slowly, "do you know that that girl, Tregulova, has drowned herself?"

"Trenieff has cut his throat!" interposed Michailov unexpectedly, as though he had not heard him.

Arbusoff raised his head in astonishment.

"What?"

"Trenieff has cut his throat!" repeated Michailov wearily.

"There we are!" said Arbusoff very thoughtfully, whistling softly. "Where do they all get it from? What an epidemic! Well, if he's cut his throat that's an end of it. There's one fool less in the world—that's not to be regretted very much; it leaves me cold. But now, do you know your girl has drowned herself?"

Michailov turned pale.

"What do you want? What's that to do . . . ?"

Arbusoff laughed heartily.

"Aha, so you do know! Well, good. Why do you ask, what for? I came . . . "

"To taunt me with it?" asked Michailov bitterly.

Arbusoff's eyes began to flash.

"Taunt? And why not? . . . Have you any idea how I've been tormented?" he added in a low voice, leaning forward so that his face was close to Michailov's.

Michailov did not answer.

"That doesn't matter to you, I suppose? Other people's pain hurts nobody? It really seems extraordinary to me that so many people are convinced that every one must be kind and sympathetic to them, whereas they themselves . . . No, my friend! Now you shall grovel in the dust and I'll look on. So you really thought you could go through life playing . . . lightly . . . crushing the tender flowers? Why are you silent now?"

"I've nothing to say to you!"

"Nothing? Well, that's not much! But do you know that you trod down human beings? . . . I see you're beginning to realize it now! I once heard a Kalmuk proverb which says that you must not water the flowers of happiness with blood. You tried to . . . well, did the flowers thrive?"

Michailov still kept silence.

"And do you know there was something else I wanted to say?" continued Arbusoff, assuming a tone of the deepest sympathy. "I see things aren't going well with you. You've been thoroughly shaken up, you're getting positively quite thin. Are you going to the funeral? It would be rather interesting!" he added sharply, as though dealing him a sudden blow.

Michailov jumped up. "How dare you?" he cried in a ringing voice.

Arbusoff looked at him complacently. "Look, you've even turned pale!" he said, as though to himself. "Oh, you're in a bad way, a bad way! But sit down, sit down!"

Without rising, he stretched out his hand and softly pressed Michailov down on his chair. "I'm really sorry for you; I mean that honestly! Because I see that you're not quite normal. But," he concluded unexpectedly, "I did love you, Seriosha!"

Michailov started. "Listen, Sachar," he began, talking somewhat quickly and excitedly, "it wasn't my fault about you. It all seemed to happen of its own accord. I suffered cruelly at the time." He stretched out his hand almost imploringly.

Arbusoff listened attentively, his head bowed.

"You were away then, Nelly was left alone . . . she invited me to go and see her occasionally. . . . You asked me to yourself. . . . I never thought about it at all, I swear to you! It happened quite suddenly, unexpectedly, one evening . . . as though a mist came over me! It was like a curse! If you only knew how I regretted it afterwards; what would I not have given for it not to have happened! That's why I separated from Nelly so soon, because you always stood between us. . . . I didn't mean to!"

"The wind blew it along!" interrupted Arbusoff, gently nodding his head, but immediately afterwards his face was distorted by such desperate, irreconcilable hatred that Michailov involuntarily started back.

"Well, why do you stop? Go on, go on! This is interesting!" Arbusoff's voice was full of scorn again. "Now, go on! Oh, you're dirt, you're nothing, that's all!" he cried madly. "It's all the same to me whether I kill you or

crush an insect, and you . . ." gasped Arbusoff, " still beg for mercy . . . for forgiveness. . . . Cad ! "

Michailov heeded neither threats nor abuse, but his raised hand sank down powerlessly and grief shadowed his face. Arbusoff recovered himself.

" Listen ! You're telling lies, saying you didn't know ! . . . You were fully conscious when you did it. You just did it because I myself begged you to see her, because I was your friend. You'd had quite enough of ordinary sensations, you wanted something extraordinary, something psychologically interesting. And there you found it, your best friend's sweetheart, entrusted to you by himself who believed your word as his own. She loves him and never looks at you and you thought you'd show them what it meant to disregard you. A fellow like Arbusoff, a nonentity, a merchant's son, claims this happiness for himself ! And where do I come in ? you thought. I, with my gifts, a handsome, clever man ! I must have the best of everything, what is left is good enough for other people ! "

" Sachar, that isn't true, that isn't true ! " cried Michailov.
" Be quiet ! I see through you now ! I've been observing you for a long time, but now your whole soul is before me, as though it were on my hand. You—what are you ? You came into the world with special gifts, not like a common man. You're a genius, good-looking, a noble soul—a super-man ! You thought everything else was as nothing in comparison to your magnificence. You thought a man like yourself could do anything, that the whole world was only created for your délectation. It never struck you that people might shed tears of blood over this splendour. What, a super-man ? No, it's a lie, you are just like the rest of us ! It'll cost you your life ! No one can trample on living hearts and go unpunished, mark that. Now you know it, too."

Silently, with quivering lips, Michailov offered him his hand. Arbusoff flung it roughly aside.

" Sachar ! "

" Ah, now you're pleading for mercy ? It's choking you, is it ? You can't stand any more ? Too late, I say ! "

There was a silence. Arbusoff looked at Michailov with frowning eyes and twitching lips. A struggle was going on within him.

"Forgive me!" said Michailov, seizing his hand.

Arbusoff wrenched himself free. Michailov hung his head.

"Yes, that's so," said Arbusoff inconsequently, "it had to come!"

Michailov's head sank still lower. There was a long silence.

"You mustn't mind, Seriosha, that I shouted at you and threatened you just now," said Arbusoff presently; "that was only sorrow. My heart was too heavy! . . . I've said good-bye to Nelly for ever."

Michailov raised his head. "But she told me she was going to you at the factory to-day," he cried.

Arbusoff waved his hand. "Oh, what's the good of that? . . ."

"Can't you forget and forgive?" asked Michailov gently and quietly.

Arbusoff slowly shook his head. "What the Scripture says about forgiveness is very beautiful, but in reality it means that one sets no value upon the object!"

Michailov was silent. On his face were traces of anguish and mental strain. "But that's terrible, Sachar! It's painful to me to speak of it, but it's not Nelly's fault, it's altogether mine. . . ."

Arbusoff smiled.

"I don't understand you; you might easily fall in love with a married woman."

Arbusoff averted his eyes as though wishing to conceal a passing thought.

"What's the matter?" asked Michailov in astonishment, but a sudden thought seized him. "Is that it?" he asked softly.

Arbusoff glanced down at him oddly. Michailov said no more.

It was painfully quiet in the room. The rain seemed to have stopped and the wind had fallen, for no sound was heard from outside. The lamp was burning dimly; on the wall the two black, gigantic shadows were motionless, their huge dark heads meeting. It was already late, and the night's silence penetrated the walls.

"I will be quite open with you!" Arbusoff suddenly

began, without raising his head. "Perhaps this is the last time I shall speak to you, so it no longer matters what I say. I meant to kill you. And I should have killed you, if it hadn't been for Augustov. He saved your life. One finds out at last that it's not so easy to kill a man! And I came for that to-day too, but no, I can't do it. When I don't see you I think I can, it seems so simple: to go up close to you and stab you just where I can. But when I see you, then it's impossible. I can't kill you, and I can't forgive you either."

Arbusoff shook his head desperately, like an ox which has become entangled in the yoke.

"It's my misfortune to love you as much as I hate you! God knows how you have bound me to you! If I had only loved you, I should have forgotten you long ago; if I had only hated you—I should have killed you like a dog."

"But that's all over . . ." murmured Michailov.

"Over? What's over? Do you know that Nelly still loves you!"

"What are you talking about, Sachar!"

"I'm speaking the truth!" Arbusoff shook his head obstinately. "Nelly loves you! You! And always loved you alone, even when she . . ."

"Stop! Not that!"

"You seem to think I'm a greater fool than I really am," sneered Arbusoff. "I know myself that she loves me too, but—what's that to do with it?"

"What do you mean?"

"Yes, my friend, every woman has a secret of that kind."

"What secret?"

"This! That a woman never forgets the man to whom she gives herself first. Even if she leaves him and loves another, even if she hates him, she will never forget him. And he need only lift his little finger to bring her back to him. She may despise herself, but she comes. It's quite natural, for she sacrifices everything. The first time shatters her whole former life. Everything is blotted out; shame and fear and purity, everything! That experience cannot be repeated a second time. Nature has only given her this feeling once, the second time cannot be the same. Of course, if I cared less for Nelly I shouldn't give the matter

another thought . . . any more than you did ! I give myself to her completely . . . but how am I to live if I have to imagine every minute that she is comparing us both in her mind ? ”

Arbusoff was silent for a time.

“ But what’s the use of talking about it. I don’t believe in God, and I have not prayed for a long time, but . . . it’s ridiculous to speak of it. . . . That night I had only one thought, that you might either die, or be killed in some way ! . . . ‘ My God,’ I thought, ‘ other people die ! Why shouldn’t he ? . . . Grant it, dear Lord ! . . . I entreat Thee with tears ! ’ . . . Absurd, I know it is absurd ; I would never mention it to any one, but it’s all the same now ! ”

“ Why do you keep saying it’s all the same now ? ” asked Michailov suddenly.

Arbusoff looked at him in amazement, almost as though surprised at Michailov’s inquiry.

“ You’ve just explained that you can’t kill me.”

“ Not you ! ” answered Arbusoff dully.

Michailov looked fixedly at him.

“ You’re not going to kill yourself ? ” he cried, terrified.

Arbusoff made no reply.

“ So that’s what you mean ? Do speak ! ” Michailov shook him by the shoulders.

Arbusoff turned his eyes aside slowly and heavily. “ It’s all the same ! ” he said almost inaudibly.

Michailov dropped his hand. “ You mustn’t do that, Sachar ! You’re mad ! What will you gain by it ? ”

“ What else can I do ? ” asked Arbusoff with brooding sarcasm.

Michailov could not answer.

“ That’s just how it is, you see ! . . . And if Nelly kills herself ? ” added Arbusoff, in a low voice.

“ Nelly ? ”

Arbusoff shrugged his shoulders. “ Yes, what else do you suppose ? What is she to do ? She’ll kill herself. Perhaps she’s done so already ! And, taking it all round, isn’t it much the same to you ? ”

“ Sachar ! ” cried Michailov, but he broke off at once. Now it all seemed like a confused dream. Arbusoff’s

delirious talk rang wildly in his ears, his great head swayed before his eyes like a nightmare. There was chaos in his soul : Nelly, Arbusoff, Lisa, Krause. . . . Trenieff's orderly with his flaxen moustache leapt into his memory. Arbusoff desired his death ! He came on purpose to drive him to it ! . . .

Once again the terrible, irremediable grief which he had so often felt of late crept up and gripped his heart. All at once it seemed to him as though he could only free himself by ending his life. Then all would be over, there would be no to-morrow. To-day Nelly had come, then he had been to see Dr. Arnoldi, then the orderly had hurried in, and now Arbusoff was sitting with him. But to-morrow nobody would be there, perhaps neither Nelly nor Arbusoff would be alive, as Lisa had already ceased to live. Lisa ! He had hardly thought of her till then, had always banished the memories, feared to let his mind dwell on her. Yes, there were many things he had not understood. But to-morrow, in the white indifferent daylight everything will be comprehensible. And the picture ? His heart contracted at the memory of it, as though he were already certain that he would not have time to finish it.

"What are you thinking of ?" He heard Arbusoff's voice from far away, as through a mist.

"What ?" he asked, and looked at him strangely, as though he saw him for the first time.—"There, that's the man who longs for my death. . . . What a strange face he has, this man who desires my death. He can't forgive and forget, and has a right to it. But why so coarse, so brutal ? Can it be that he isn't sorry for me ?"

When Arbusoff raised his head and saw Michailov's pale, haggard face, he touched his hand and cried loudly : "Serge !"

Michailov made no reply, as though he had not heard him.

"Serge !" cried Arbusoff a second time.

Michailov leant forward to him, with a wan, supplicating smile.

"Do you know," he said in an unfamiliar voice, "it really is remarkable that you just happened to come to me to-day."

"What is there remarkable in it ?"

"As though you knew."

"Knew what? What are you talking about?"

"Do you know, I began a new picture to-day." Michailov was quite animated all at once. "Would you like me to show it to you?"

"I've seen it. I'm not concerned with pictures."

"Oh, have you seen it?" Michailov lowered his voice and passed his hand across his brow. "I've been working at it all day long. . . ."

"It's a wonder you found time for that!" interposed Arbusoff spitefully. "Do you feel in the mood for painting canvas to-day of all days? . . ."

Michailov clutched at his head.

"What is the matter with you?" asked Arbusoff with an excitement which he could not understand. "Are you ill?"

"No, I'm very well . . . only . . ."

"Are you mad or are you laughing at me?" cried Arbusoff, trying to banish the fear which suddenly gripped his heart.

"Perhaps! . . . And do you know that I meant to shoot myself to-day? I got out the revolver. . . . But I didn't shoot myself after all!"

"I see that!" Arbusoff laughed nervously.

Suddenly a thought flashed across his mind which almost deprived him of consciousness. He closed his eyes craftily.

"No, I shouldn't do that! People like you don't shoot themselves. Don't you do it! You will still find life very enjoyable!"

"It would please you very much though, Sachar, if I had shot myself!"

"Stuff and nonsense!" Arbusoff rose. "You're out of your mind!"

"Listen!" Michailov went up close to him, but Arbusoff pushed him aside.

"No . . . listen!" repeated Michailov, coming nearer.

A terrible fear seized Arbusoff. "What?" he cried.

Michailov was standing beside him; his face was pallid, and his lips quivered.

"Listen!" he said for the third time, as though he could not think of the right words.

"Stop, Serge! . . . I'm going!" murmured Arbusoff without taking his eyes off him.

"Do you know that I . . . perhaps I really . . ."

"Pull yourself together, can't you! What is the matter with you?" Arbusoff grasped him powerfully by the shoulders, but Michailov tore himself away furiously.

"Go away!" he cried wildly. "Go away, or I'll kill you! You came on purpose to kill me. Very well then. . . ."

He was trembling all over. Suddenly he walked to the other end of the studio, threw something on to the floor, and began hastily to search in the drawer of the table with trembling hands.

Arbusoff remained standing motionless. He thought he must lose his own reason. Cornet Krause's bleeding face flashed into his memory. His first thought was to hurl himself upon Michailov and bind his hands together with a towel, like a madman's, but another idea, which occurred to him almost simultaneously, prevented him.

Michailov was still groping in the drawer, flinging everything that came into his hands on to the floor, and murmuring feverishly to himself:

"Very well then . . . all right . . . all right . . ."

Arbusoff could see that the revolver Michailov was looking for was lying on the table under the dirty palette. There was still time to seize it, but he was unable to move from the spot.

"What am I doing? Quickly! quickly!" . . . flashed across his mind, but strange weakness paralysed him. It was as though his body were asleep and his whole life concentrated in his wild, rolling eyes, fixed on the small, glittering object under the dirty palette.

At last Michailov had pulled out the drawer altogether and thrown it on to the floor. The palette was jerked aside and the barrel of the revolver peeped out. Now he too could see it.

Still Arbusoff might have pulled him back.

"Serge!" he cried, but, turning round suddenly, he hurled himself against the door, and rushed out of the room.

He was fully conscious, but he thought he did not know what his flight meant at that minute. He imagined that he heard Michailov's cry behind him, but he did not pause.

Chill and light surrounded him. The daybreak was close at hand, but although the lucent twilight already penetrated everything the sun had not yet risen. The torn night clouds had sunk into one strip on the horizon, above which the clear magnificent sky rose without a single cloud. Below, among the trees, it was still damp and misty, but on the crest of the lonely poplar at the end of the garden a rosy brilliance gleamed, and its few golden leaves contracted in expectation of light and warmth.

Arbusoff looked round and noticed nothing. Hatless, dishevelled, with pallid face and staring eyes, he tore through the streets, driven along by the one thought that he would go mad the moment he heard the slightest sound behind him.

CHAPTER LX

NELLY was sitting alone in her room towards evening.

She had already heard of Michailov's suicide, presumably due to mental derangement. This was apparently caused by Lisa Tregulova's death; at least Arbusoff, who had been present, related a story to that effect to the police next morning.

The news itself did not shock her. She had actually expected the event, and received the confirmation of it with almost indifferent composure. She only had a sensation as though something had been torn out of her soul which had devastated and numbed it for ever.

Nelly did not go to the funeral, but she heard afterwards that the whole town had been to the churchyard, that he had been buried under a mass of flowers on a clear, bright autumn day, and that his grave was near those of Cornet Krause and Trenieff.

Her imagination was incessantly filled with thoughts of that bright day, with the last golden leaves on the trees, with the sharp, autumnal air, and the clear sun, which no longer warmed the earth.

The darkness in the depths of her starved soul was intensified by contrast, and the fearful decision to which she had come a long time ago became yet firmer and more irrevocable.

She contemplated it quite calmly and clearly. The thought of death did not alarm her, she wished only to take leave of life with full consciousness, by sheer force of will. She had thought it all out in cold blood: as she did not possess a revolver and abhorred the thought of the green depths of the river, she had decided to poison herself. The poison was to be as strong as possible, so that the gruesome details of a prolonged agony might be avoided. So she had sent a note to Dr. Arnoldi, asking him to name an hour when she would find him alone, to which he replied that she could come the same evening about nine o'clock, as he would be occupied with his patients till then. Nelly knew

that on a shelf in the old doctor's room a small bottle of poison stood among various dusty boxes and glasses ; and she hoped she would have time to appropriate this without its being noticed by the absent-minded old doctor. It was nearly eight o'clock, and Nelly was calmly awaiting the appointed hour.

She sat motionless at the table, her elbows resting on the cloth, the chin of her thin pale face on the palm of her hand. She was very thin, her lips were dry and compressed. Nelly was scarcely thinking of anything. Only colourless fragments of memories flitted across her vision and vanished without a trace. She regretted nothing, her mood was not sad or despondent—her soul was merely vacant and dark. When Arbusoff's image filled her mind her eyebrows contracted more sharply, but the expression of her eyes remained as hard as before. She assumed that all was over between them for ever, and wished to remember nothing.

Then she suddenly heard the sound of a heavy tread on the steps and she started, turned pale and staggered back from the table, as though she knew that he would come. When Arbusoff entered, he remained standing at the door, without looking at her.

He had completely changed in the last few days : the handsome melancholy face had become haggard and yellow, as though he had just recovered from a severe illness, and his black flashing eyes glanced round so keenly that it seemed as though he were investigating a suspicious case.

" Well, here I am again ; you didn't expect me, I dare say ? " he asked in a very husky, uncertain tone, without, however, coming any nearer ; having taken off his cap, he stood where he was, his arms hanging limply at his sides.

Nelly, leaning against the table, on the edge of which she supported herself with her hands, looked at him in silence for some minutes.

She herself would not have been able to explain what she felt at this moment. She took his coming as a matter of course, and an almost frantic joy took possession of her, though it did not occur to her for a second that it could influence her resolve in any way. She even glanced at the clock on the wall, to assure herself that she would not be late for her appointment with Dr. Arnoldi. She felt like

one condemned to death, who sees his dearest and most cherished friend for the last time.

She looked long into his tortured, feverish eyes, at his haggard, terribly altered face, so infinitely dear and precious. And suddenly, in one moment, some mysterious inner force enabled her to realise all that he had been through in those three days. What had passed between him and Michailov became dreadfully and painfully clear to her, and she was moved by desperate pity for him.

"Soria, Soria!" she cried, and she stretched out her hands towards him.

At first Arbusoff looked at her wildly, then he saw her eyes full of tears of pity and love, and, dropping his cap, he caught her as she rushed into his arms.

"Soria!" she murmured faintly, hiding her head on his shoulder and clasping his neck convulsively with her thin, supple hands.

And then she felt herself raised by strong arms.

Arbusoff forgot all that he had endured, everything melted in the overwhelmingly joyful ecstasy of passion and of love. He carried Nelly through the room like a child that is rocked to sleep, kissing her breast, her hands, her knees, and repeating the same thing like one demented.

"Nellitchka . . . my Nellitchka!"

"Have you come to me? . . . Have you really come? . . . My poor darling, my dearest," she whispered in his ear.

"So you do love me? . . . Do you really love me? . . ."

She made no resistance when he led her to the bed with the white quilt, so pure and virginal, and he saw nothing but her large eyes, radiant with happiness.

CHAPTER LXI

It was over as suddenly as it had begun, burnt out like a furious fire, and they came to themselves, unable to realize how it could have happened. Nelly lay on the bed, her crisp wavy hair spreading over the pillow, her face dark and her eyes tired with languid, blissful weariness.

Arbusoff sat beside her on the edge of the bed in an uncomfortably strained position, breathing heavily and nervously, his black hair clinging to his brow.

A tumult was going on within him. He suddenly realized that his soul had been wrecked and laid waste in the last few minutes, and it bewildered him.

It was all over. What he had striven for so long, hesitating at nothing, had happened. He was conscious of physical pain, his heart beat violently in his breast, and an insane, incomprehensible repulsion saturated his whole being. He felt neither happiness, nor delight, nor passion . . . nothing but fatigue and abhorrence and an invincible desire to leave her, and at the same time the consciousness of an irreparable spiritual calamity.

It was inexplicable to him that he should have suffered, hated, and loved so keenly only for the sake of this momentary flash of gratification, after which there was nothing left. He was afraid to look at Nelly in case she might notice the loathing in his eyes.

And she understood nothing. She clasped his hand against her breast with both hers, and closed her eyes in happy exhaustion.

He hated her burning face with its rapturous expression, the touch of her soft breast, beneath which he could feel her rapid heart-beats; he hated himself, suddenly grown so weak and shrunken, and his own and her dishevelled appearance.

"What is it . . . oh, what is it ?" he asked himself, tremulous with anxiety, for he felt himself crashing headlong down a precipice. And suddenly he heard Michailov's

shrill voice close to his ear again. "Serge!" flashed through his mind in indescribable despair and remorse. "What have I done! . . .

Nelly raised herself slightly, and two thin, supple arms were flung round his neck, as they had been shortly before, when she had surrendered to him so unexpectedly. But this time it was already different—an infinitely tender, intimate, and grateful embrace. Arbusoff started as though a reptile had touched him.

"No, no! . . . Now you are mine for ever!" a soft voice whispered in his ear. "You'll stay with me, won't you? . . . I shall never let you go away again!"

She caressed him, stroking his hair and face, clinging to him, soft, ardent, and unresisting, carried away by passion.

"Yes, yes . . . of course . . ." murmured Arbusoff, who asked himself in terror what he should do next, and how he could explain to her what was such a mystery to himself.

"You'll stay? . . . You won't leave me again?" asked Nelly happily.

"Yes, yes . . ." murmured Arbusoff, but he suddenly continued in a business-like tone, though he noticed himself that the unnatural voice betrayed him . . . "only, I don't quite know . . . you see, to-day I simply must go to the factory; Naumoff's away, you know. . . ."

Nelly noticed nothing.

"To the factory? . . . I shan't let you go. What else, indeed!"

"No, really, I must go!"

This time the repulsion and anger in his voice were too clearly expressed, for her hands dropped suddenly, gliding down from his shoulders like dead snakes, and her wide-open eyes looked straight into his soul.

Arbusoff hung his head under her gaze.

"Soria?" said Nelly hesitatingly, her voice muffled, as though she dreaded her rising thoughts.

He did not know how to answer; he was embarrassed, anxious, and continued to avoid her eyes.

"No, really . . . it wouldn't do!"

But her spirits soon rose and she became quite cheerful.

"Dearest . . . it's all the same to me now . . . I don't care!"

"No, really . . . I'd better come when . . . another time! . . ." he murmured. It seemed as though the floor were sinking beneath his feet.

"How? . . . another time?" asked Nelly, involuntarily moving further to one side.

Her enormous eyes, which seemed to fill her whole face, penetrated more and more deeply into his soul. Arbusoff leapt to his feet; he could have cried out with grief and desperation.

"Now, what's the matter? . . . I positively have to. . . . What a funny girl!" His voice sounded unfamiliar and assumed the jocular tone of a commercial traveller who has just begun to drink.

And this time it really was the end. Nelly opened her eyes still wider, illuminated by a sudden flash of intuition, and then buried her face in the pillow.

Arbusoff wanted to rush up to her and dared not. For a minute he moved about aimlessly and meaninglessly, with a distorted smile, although he felt that it disfigured his face.

Then he seized his overcoat quietly, like a thief, tiptoed to the door, and looked round again. Suddenly he slipped out, still with the same pitiable, embarrassed smile.

CHAPTER LXII

THE dark night was full of stars. The constellations were strewn about the sky in glittering, incredibly bright patterns, while beneath the heavens everything was merged into a jet-black, opaque mass.

Arbusoff could hardly find his troika.

The coachman, who had prepared himself for a long wait, had dismounted from his box and was sitting on the step smoking a cigarette, which lit up his red beard and thick lips when it glowed in the darkness.

Arbusoff walked quickly to his carriage.

"Who's that? . . . You, Sachar Maximitch?" asked the coachman, who sprang up, flinging away his cigarette as he did so. "Shall we go?"

Arbusoff pushed past him without a word, got in, and crouched down in the carriage. As on that other occasion he had forgotten his cap and did not notice it.

The coachman was curious, but he did not think it advisable to ask questions. He climbed on to the box with dignity, and, after separating the reins, he gave the horses the signal to start. The bells rang unmelodiously through the darkness.

Arbusoff had not spoken a word.

"Where do you wish to go, Sachar Maximitch?" asked the coachman at length, turning round on the box.

He received no answer. Arbusoff's dark figure was crouching in the corner of the carriage.

"Where do you wish to go?" repeated the coachman.

"To the devil!" cried Arbusoff angrily.

The coachman was so alarmed by this frantic cry that he almost dropped the reins and struck the horses furiously.

Arbusoff was thrown backwards, clods of earth flew into his face, and the black shapes of houses, fences, and trees shot past him.

At a corner some one cried out and the carriage was

jerked upwards, as though some one had been run over, but the horses could not be held in check. In vain the coachman, who had lost his hat, pulled so hard at the tightened reins that he almost fell backwards ; he could distinguish nothing in the darkness, and his one idea was to keep the troika in the middle of the street so that it should not be dashed against any of the milestones.

Arbusoff took no notice. He sat there, his eyes closed, conscious of being hurled from one side to the other, and of the wind, which took his breath away, rushing through his hair ; he could not shake off the dull lethargy which possessed him.

He did not understand what had happened. . . . He only knew that Nelly would kill herself now, that he had ruined her as well as himself, and that he couldn't bear the burden of those two shattered lives—hers and Michailov's.

At one moment he longed to stop the carriage, jump out, step aside, and simply put a bullet through his head. It was impossible to imagine that he could continue to live as before. "Stop !" he shouted.

The troika, which had now left the town behind, was plunging along a broad high-road in a measured gallop, straight into the night and gloom, groaning and creaking in every joint.

There must have been something extraordinary in Arbusoff's cry, for the coachman, who would not have been able to bring the horses to a standstill a minute before, now pulled the reins with such force that the horses fell back on their hind-quarters and sank down. Arbusoff was dashed against the box, while the coachman suddenly appeared somewhere in the depths almost under the horses' hind legs.

"Turn to the right . . . to the monastery !" Arbusoff shouted.

The coachman, whose hand was torn and bleeding, and his lip cut, crept with difficulty from under the horses, climbed on to the box again, and, beside himself with fright, urged on the horses anew to a full gallop.

"He's gone off his head !" he thought, but he dared not protest.

The smooth, dark Steppe flew past, ridges and ditches

which separated one field from another loomed indistinctly, the wind roared monotonously against the carriage, everything flashed back in gigantic circles and only the glittering stars set in their eternal patterns sparkled steadfastly in the heavens.

CHAPTER LXIII

THE rain poured down in torrents and the wretched little town melted away, pale and hazy, in the dim watery light of the autumn day.

The gardens, already strewn with yellow leaves, looked empty and bare, puddles glistened and quivered at every turn of the street and in the dirty gutters the water tore along beside the wood pavements whose boards had long since begun to decay. Far away in the distance the Steppes were drenched in rain, and behind them it seemed as though nothing more could exist; as though, alone in the whole world, the little town were eking out its last miserable days.

Tchish hurried down the boulevard, his coat-collar turned up. His slim figure looked small and shrunken against the shimmering sheets of rain. The whole place was empty, every living thing had crept away from the rain, while he alone had to hurry along. Never before had he felt so utterly solitary.

"The clouds drift" . . . thought the little student mechanically, "the rain falls. . . . For millions of years the clouds will drift and the rain will fall, as they are doing now. . . . I must have my goloshes repaired! . . . I must get away from here. . . . I shall die here! . . . Perhaps I am dead already? . . . What a life! If I could only go to Petersburg . . . there are theatres there, and the university."

He imagined the long, cold Nevski Prospect, with its gay signs, its dripping cabs, its shining pavements glistening with moisture, and its many houses, houses without end. Sluggishly and drearily flows the dark Neva, traversed by unknown craft, through the mist breaks the summit of the fortress, and in this fortress sit men who have dreamed of another life. . . . They pace from one corner to another of their tiny cells, look through the little windows and see behind the bars the same grey, weeping sky that stretches

here above his own head, over the Steppes, the wet gardens and the damp roofs of the desolate little town.

"Confound it, how sickening! . . . I simply must have these goloshes repaired! As soon as I've got some money I must see about it . . . otherwise I can bet anything on inflammation of the lungs. Perhaps that wouldn't be so bad. Better to die at once, and know no more of this weather, these clouds, this rain . . . and not have to think about the goloshes. . . . What about going to the club?"

Tchish turned the corner, walked through the thin, liquid mud across the square, and mounted the steps of the club, which were also dirty from top to bottom. There was no one in the porter's office, Dr. Arnoldi's well-known hat was hanging on the stand. Though Tchish was glad to see it, it depressed him at the same time; it was a relief to him not to be alone, but how often he had sat here before, with the same companion, spiritually as exhausted and despondent as he was now.

Dr. Arnoldi was sitting in the refreshment-room. A small decanter of vodka was placed before him, the knotted ends of his table-napkin moved up and down behind his ears, his face was sunk on his breast like a jelly, and his eyes looked dimly away over the untouched plate of soup, which was growing cold in front of him.

"How do you do, Doctor!" cried the little student, and again it occurred to him that he had made that remark many times.

Dr. Arnoldi gasped out some reply, staring at the vodka.

"Oh, take it away. . . . One's whole soul is steeped in it!" Tchish frowned disgustedly, holding out his wine-glass nevertheless. He watched attentively, almost impatiently, while the white liquid mounted higher and higher in the glass under the doctor's fat, slightly trembling hand.

"Frightful weather, damn it," said the little student, clinking glasses with the doctor, and, after he had gulped down the spirit, he made a gesture of repulsion.

"Yes?" panted Dr. Arnoldi.

"I wonder at you, Doctor. . . . You are a free man, with plenty of money . . ." began Tchish, pausing, however, as he remembered that he had discussed the same question

with the doctor once before. He sighed and looked out on to the courtyard of the fire-station. Suddenly he thought of the churchyard ; the wet yellow leaves on the graves.

" How horrible it is there ! " he murmured to himself.

And, strangely enough, the doctor seemed to understand what he meant.

" Yes, not exactly beautiful . . ." he said.

" And how stupid it all is ! " continued Tchish, involuntarily pouring out more vodka. " What do you think, Doctor ; did Arbusoff know Michailov was going to shoot himself or not ? "

The doctor did not reply at once.

" I suppose he must have known," he said at length, in a dull voice.

" What was the meaning of it ? They used to be friends. . . . Jealousy, I suppose ? "

" I don't know."

" And where is Arbusoff now ? "

" I don't know."

" And the . . . what's her name . . . Nelly . . . they say she tried . . . "

" I don't know ! " interrupted Dr. Arnoldi.

They both finished their glasses.

Tchish would have liked to ask more questions, partly about Michailov, and partly about his own mood of dejection. He could not find his way about this labyrinth of events ; it was as though a mist enwrapped him. But he did not like to repeat the hackneyed words, for he felt too keenly that not all his lamentations and protests could help those who had perished. Useless to argue now ! Besides, he experienced a positive difficulty in moving his tongue.

" Well, shall we finish the bottle ? " he asked absently.

But there was no more vodka in the decanter. Dr. Arnoldi held it up to the light meditatively, put it aside again, and made a sign in the direction of the bar.

" Yes," he said finally, as he filled his glass from the fresh decanter.

" Yes what ? " asked the little student.

Dr. Arnoldi gave no explanation.

The little student refilled his glass and set it down in front

of him. He felt that it was absolutely essential to rouse himself out of this state of depression, to work himself up, even artificially, into a temper, to make a noise, to fight, anything to banish this grey, empty silence. Then he began :

" We two are left alone, Doctor, you and I, and yet it's not so long ago since they were all here . . . drinking, arguing, quarrelling ! . . . Naumoff philosophizing . . . and Eugenia Samoilovna . . . and Michailov . . . and Krause. . . . And poor Trenieff ! . . . Who would have thought it ? It was that woman who ruined him ! "

" It was nothing to do with the woman ! " Dr. Arnoldi observed suddenly.

Tchish's first impulse was to contradict him, but for some reason he checked himself.

" Yes, it's grown very empty ! As though the wind had scattered them all ! . . . Are you afraid of loneliness, Doctor ? "

" No, " said Dr. Arnoldi indifferently, pushing the glass towards him.

Tchish took it mechanically and raised it to his lips.

" And what do you think ? " He put the empty glass down on the table. " Was the whole catastrophe Naumoff's fault in the end, or was it only a coincidence ? "

" Who knows ! " said Dr. Arnoldi still unmoved.

" But what do you think ? "

" I don't think anything."

Looking at the withered face with the flaccid cheeks, Tchish saw that the clean-shaven lips were quivering faintly. A sharp pang shot through his heart.

" What's the matter with you, Doctor ? How strange you are ! "

" I am always like that."

" Do you know, it seems to me as though in your inmost soul you are the one who sympathizes most with that crazy engineer and his philosophy."

" Naumoffism, " he continued meditatively, as the doctor, instead of replying, only blinked vaguely, " is possibly justified in the present state of society, which has actually attained the zenith of science and art. Naturally a society which has taken all there was to take and drained the cup of pleasure to the dregs must be faced by the problem :

'What next?' And no doubt it must be solved by Naumoff's theory. . . . That I can understand, but . . ."

Tchish grew animated and his tuft of hair rose victoriously.

"But we have no right to cast the black shadow of death over future generations! Others will step into the arena of life—the working classes, whose flag bears the device: 'Happiness for all!' . . . With them comes a new science, a new art. They ardently desire a strong, beautiful, bright existence. They do not sympathize with this Naumoffism! Their souls are not desolate, they will never recognize Naumoff's ethics, begotten as they are of the enfeebled, pampered, effete present." Tchish's eyes gleamed, his cheeks crimsoned.

Dr. Arnoldi sighed. "Oh, you'll get tired of that, too, one day."

"You're an awful pessimist, Doctor! Really you're worse than Naumoff!" he cried.

"Perhaps."

"Then why don't you shoot yourself, Doctor?" sneered the little student.

Again the doctor fixed his small expressionless eyes on him. After a time he answered:

"Why should I shoot myself? I've been dead for a long time as it is!"

Tchish started. A strange chill floated through his soul. At the moment he really experienced a dream-like sensation of sitting and conversing with a dead man.

"What do you mean by that, Doctor?" he faltered.

The doctor was silent.

"I say, Doctor, have you gone mad? . . . Doctor!" cried Tchish suddenly in a plaintive tone.

The doctor winked, as though he need no longer conceal his sarcasm, calmly stretched his fat hand across the table and refilled both glasses.

"Let us drink," he said.

CHAPTER LXIV

THE streets were dark and the wind blew in gusts.

Fat, clumsy Dr. Arnoldi and the little student Tchish walked arm in arm over the damp wooden cross-boards of the pavement. Tchish, who was constantly slipping in the mud, cried out excitedly :

" You're a dead man, Doctor ! . . . nothing more ! . . . Do you know you are—dead ? . . . I am very fond of you, but all the same, you're dead ! "

" All right, all right," answered Dr. Arnoldi indifferently, supporting Tchish's arm.

" I tell you so candidly, Doctor, because I'm very fond of you. . . . Do you believe I'm fond of you ? "

" Yes, yes. . . ."

" This is a frightful hole, Doctor ! . . . It's a town of the dead ! . . . Sometimes I think, Doctor, that I only imagine it. . . . That it isn't a town, only an apparition ! . . . Is it possible, Doctor, that thousands of people live in this dreary hole, in this damnable spot, only to eat, to drink, to sleep ? . . . It's like a nightmare ! . . . You've only to look round : darkness, wind, rain, mud, no life in the streets. . . . No, just look ; could one believe it's a town and that people live here ? . . . Real, living people, so-called humanity ? . . . What do they live for ? . . . Imagine that this town no longer exists . . . that the rain has dissolved it and swept it into the river . . . like a dung-heap. . . . It would not make an atom of difference to the world ! . . . In fact no one would even notice that this accursed swamp had ceased to exist ! . . . And why should it ? . . . For a few clerks, shop-keepers, townsfolk, officers. . . . And when you come to think that exactly the same shop-keepers, townsfolk, officers and clerks are in every little town . . . just like these ! . . . Why should there be these millions of duplicates when even the original is vile ? . . . Perhaps it's raining just like this at hundreds of places, the same filthy weather, the same wind and gloom, and a couple like our-

selves wandering about. Aren't you filled with despair, Doctor ? "

" No, why should I be ? . . ." replied Dr. Arnoldi, who could scarcely keep him on his feet.

" Oh, nothing enrages you ! . . . You are a dead man ! "

" I've told you so already."

" Yes, but do you feel it ? Do you feel that even during your lifetime you are beginning to decay, Doctor ? . . . We all decay during our lives ! . . . It's time for us all to be in the churchyard, Doctor ! "

" It's time, it's time," answered Dr. Arnoldi absently.

" I don't understand, Doctor, how you can live like that ! . . . That's death ! "

" Death ! "

" But do you know that you go further than Naumoff ? He at least believes in annihilation, but you believe in nothing ! . . . Or do you believe in anything, Doctor ? "

" I believe in nothing."

" What does that mean ? You believe nothing, or you believe in nothing ? "

" Let's go on, let's go on . . ." answered the doctor.

" No, wait . . . tell me, do you believe in anything ? You're not a vacuum, confound it ! "

The doctor sighed.

" Perhaps I am . . ." he murmured wearily.

Tchish laughed loudly.

" That's splendid, Doctor ! . . . I'm sure no one has ever gone so far as to regard himself as a vacuum, and be content with it ! . . . But how does it all work out, Doctor ? . . . I don't object to thinking myself a vacuum . . . but after that ? . . ."

" I don't know." The fat doctor grasped his arm more firmly.

After they had gone a few steps the little student suddenly wrenched himself free, almost falling as he did so. He tried to steady himself by leaning against the damp fence to continue his arguments.

" I don't know, I don't know. . . . What does it all mean ; I don't know. . . . No one can live without some basis."

“Of course not . . . but one does live ! ” replied the doctor indifferently.

“Does one live ? We don’t live, but only decay ! And that’s absurd ! You pollute the air ! Even a living being is stifled who comes into contact with you ! . . . I am stifled here, Doctor ! . . . Do you call that living ? ” he cried in a loud petulant voice, clasping the doctor’s hand. “Who calls that life ? . . . I haven’t a farthing, Doctor, and no tobacco. . . . So I get drunk. . . . It’s the end, Doctor ! . . . I feel that it’s the end ! ”

“Oh, nonsense, come now ! ” the doctor encouraged him.

They advanced slowly in the darkness. The wind rushed to and fro. Scudding clouds tore in clusters above the damp roofs and black trees, whose gnarled branches swayed in every direction. Tchish slipped continually in the mud. At the corner he would have fallen again, if the doctor had not with difficulty been able to support him. He propped him up against the wall like an inanimate object, picked up his cap which had fallen into the dirt, and, without wiping it, he replaced it crookedly on Tchish’s head, not noticing what he did.

“But I have faith, Doctor ! ” cried Tchish, trying in vain to get away from the fence. “Perhaps I’m done for already . . . perhaps this is the end of me . . . perhaps I shall turn into a drunkard, but all the same, I believe ! I believe, Doctor ! . . . However it may be, I believe ! I believe in humanity, Doctor ! . . . In the people ! . . . In the proletariat ! . . . Forward, arise, ye sons of labour ! ” shouted the little student with a false ring in his voice. “The future belongs to the people, Doctor ! I am a proletarian, Doctor, the poor beggar, Tchish, absolutely superfluous . . . but this Tchish believes ! . . . His belief is unfailing ! I believe ! . . . Let us renounce the old world ! . . . Let us sing, Doctor ! . . . Let us renounce the old world ! . . . Sing, Doctor ! ”

“Let’s go to sleep instead,” said Dr. Arnoldi, doing his utmost to drag him away.

“Where shall we go ? ”

“Home.”

“Home ? I have no home, Doctor ! . . . Let us renounce the old world, we will reduce it to dust and ashes.”

Tchish, who was entirely absorbed in directing an invisible choir, suddenly slipped from the doctor's grasp, took a false step, slid down with both feet and sat in the mud.

Dr. Arnoldi raised him with difficulty and set the dripping cap on his head again.

"Now, come, let us get on."

Tchish was silent, as though the intoxication had passed, and did not speak another word, but walked on gasping with laboured breath, one side uncomfortably pressed forward because the doctor was holding his arm too high up.

"So I'm very drunk!" he said presently. "Well, I don't care a damn! If we're to smash up, Doctor, then to the sound of music!"

"Right, right!" said Dr. Arnoldi wearily.

"Because it's all the same, Doctor . . . all the same! . . . Do you call that life? . . . Am I a human being? . . . It's all up with me, Doctor. . . . It's the end."

And Tchish suddenly began to weep, stumbling and slipping, while he tried with outstretched arms to keep his balance.

CHAPTER LXV

He did not awaken until late the next morning.

It was grey, damp, and cold in his room. A dark hard day, with a lowering leaden sky, overhung the earth.

The little student had a headache, his tongue felt like a block of wood, his feet and hands were trembling with weakness, and in his soul lurked a sensation of irreparable shame.

He tried to remember what had actually happened on the previous day, but he had no definite recollection.

At first he and Dr. Arnoldi had been drinking and talking in the dimly-lit empty dining-room, and they had been quite sober, till suddenly the lamp had been lighted and several vague figures appeared, people whose faces he could not recall, but of whom he remembered that they were all very nice, congenial people, who liked him. He had drunk the health of one and kissed him. Then a dispute had arisen, he had challenged some one, while somebody else held his hand, but he wrenched himself free and yelled, shouted. . . . What happened afterwards vanished into black chaos, till at last he walked through the streets arm in arm with Dr. Arnoldi, singing and assuring the doctor of his eternal affection.

What depressed him most was an incident of which he had no distinct recollection. Apparently he had assured a superior police-officer with whom he had been drinking that he would transform his soul so completely that he, the officer, should one day march at the head of the people when they arose to battle for their liberty, whereupon it seemed that the officer had taken him by the arm, agreeing with everything, and persuaded him to go home.

All that was loathsome, stupid and miserable. Tchish was certain that the whole town would be talking of nothing else. He tried to convince himself that all these were only trifles, all of which would be forgotten next day, and that many people behaved worse when they were sober ; but

the feeling of shame and abhorrence did not diminish and became unbearable.

Two letters were lying on the table. Tchish overcame his weakness and tore open the envelopes. He tried to read the letters, but the characters swam and danced before his eyes, and the sickness and giddiness with an acute, shooting pain in the temples increased so much that he dropped the letters and lay down again. But immediately everything seemed to give way beneath him, the walls began to move behind him, and the ceiling above his head revolved more and more rapidly round its own axis.

Tchish got up again and sat down at the window, not knowing what to do. A vague passion took possession of him and he would have liked to dash his head against the wall. Yet the slightest movement resulted in an agonizing spasm in the temples, and everything darkened before his eyes, so that he was forced not to move, scarcely to breathe.

"Confound it all! . . . I'll never drink again as long as I live!" he thought in desperation.

An old woman, the cook, came in, bringing the boiling samovar. Thick clouds of steam shot up to the ceiling like arrows, making him feel worse than before, his head grew more dizzy, the sickness rose to his throat.

"My god, what is it!" thought Tchish in anguish, pressing both hands to his brow. He felt terribly lonely, forsaken and forgotten. He wished some one would come and console him.

Then the tea boiled. The hot, bitter liquid certainly revived him—at least it took away the horrible taste in his mouth—but it made his heart palpitate and grow heavy.

It occurred to him that it would do him good if he were to drink something sour. He knocked on the wall.

"Anna Vassilievna! . . . Give me a lemon, for god's sake, will you?"

"In a minute."

Tchish heard the landlady busily closing the door of the cupboard on the other side of the wall, and tapping a plate with a knife. Every sound made his headache worse, the lemon seemed never to be coming; he could have wept with sick impatience.

At length the landlady appeared with a saucer, on which lay a large yellow lemon, cut in half.

"Good morning, Cyril Dmitrievitch! Here's your lemon."

"Thank you, why so much? I only wanted a small piece."

The landlady's thickly-powdered face with its double chin smiled knowingly.

"No matter, eat it, and may it do you good! . . . Aren't you ashamed of yourself?"

"What is there to be ashamed of?" replied Tchish with unnatural sharpness, avoiding her gaze.

"Don't you feel well? Does your head ache? . . . Poor dear!" said Anna Vassilievna with coquettish sympathy. "Would you like me to make you a compress?"

"Oh, never mind. . . . It's not worth while! It'll pass over in time."

"No, no, let me! At once!"

She went out quickly, her full figure billowing in every direction.

Tchish drank two glasses of tea with lemon, after which he really felt better. And a warmth crept into his soul, now that he was no longer quite alone.

"She's not such a bad sort after all!" he thought, forgetting how her constant coquetry and continual display of her forty-year-old charms irritated him.

The landlady soon returned, bringing a towel soaked in vinegar and a small decanter of vodka.

"What's that for?" cried Tchish, shuddering at the sight of the vodka.

"Never mind, never mind, drink some; it will do you good. My late husband always did that."

She almost forced Tchish to finish his glass. The little student, whom misery had deprived of the last vestige of will, submitted to her ministrations. He even thought it very pleasant to be pampered, for it was long since he had known caresses or sympathy.

In spite of the spasm of reluctance with which he raised the first glass to his lips, he was persuaded to swallow it, and at once became conscious of an agreeable warmth,

which spread through his whole body like a faint weariness.

"Now, one more glass. . . . There now."

It seemed impossible to swallow the second, but to his astonishment it slipped down his throat easily. The trembling ceased and the stabbing pain in the temples was dulled.

"There, you see, and at first you didn't want to! . . . You feel better, don't you?" said the landlady anxiously, all her coquetry gone.

Tchish smiled.

"Yes, much better!"

"There, you see. . . . Always do what I tell you! . . . And now lie down; I will make you a compress."

The little student was quite embarrassed.

"Oh, give it to me. . . . I can do it myself."

"No, no! Please don't make difficulties! There, you see."

Tchish lay down on the bed, smiling shyly. Anna Vassilievna seated herself beside him, deftly covered his forehead with the cold towel smelling of vinegar, and smoothed it out with both hands.

Tchish saw her plump arms, still rounded and soft, bare almost to the shoulders where the wide sleeves of her dressing-jacket fell back. A faint smell of scent, powder, and something else emanated from her, at once repelling and attracting the little student.

The cold compress did his headache good; a refreshing weariness crept through his whole body.

Anna Vassilievna sat beside him, smoothing the towel from time to time. Tchish smiled awkwardly at her. He felt the warmth and softness of her body against his own.

"But how did you get into this state?" she asked reproachfully in the tone which experienced women of a certain age use to young men in whom they are interested.

"Well . . . I went to the club . . . met Dr. Arnoldi . . . we didn't drink much at first and then, the devil only knows how. . . ."

"But why. . . ."

"It's so dull here, Anna Vassilievna!"

"That's because you're always and ever alone! . . . Certainly. Why shouldn't one have a drop to drink sometimes, but . . . don't be offended at my speaking like this: I'm old enough to be your mother. . . ."

"Oh, scarcely like my mother!" The little student tried awkwardly to pay her a compliment while his glance fell again on her bare arms. "She's not at all bad," he thought.

Anna Vassilievna laughed and held up her finger threateningly. He was ashamed, but at the same time inflamed by the thought:—Why not?

"Certainly, almost old enough to be your mother!" she repeated, and it seemed to Tchish that she pressed her warm soft body more closely to his. "And you see, if one once begins to drink, the next time . . ."

"Are you afraid I shall take to drink?" laughed Tchish, almost unconsciously absorbing her intoxicating warmth.

Anna Vassilievna blushed faintly, and in a moment she looked much younger and prettier.

"Oh, rubbish. . . . But I am sorry for you. You are always so lonely . . . I am lonely too, but I am old, and you are a young man. You need affection, sympathy. . . ."

There was really a caressing note in her voice. The little student looked at her gratefully.

"You are very kind to-day, Anna Vassilievna!"

"Really?" she asked roguishly, bending down low over him.

"By god!" Tchish's voice trembled, and he surprised himself by adding: "I should like to kiss you!"

Their eyes met for a moment with a look of unconcealed desire.

"Now, lie still, lie still!" said Anna Vassilievna, and she stood up as though something had alarmed her.

Only a minute before her proximity had inconvenienced Tchish, and now it positively hurt him physically and annoyed him that she should rise.

"Are you going already?" he asked.

"You must go to sleep. . . . You know you're ill!" she laughed without looking at him, but she stretched her full, capacious figure slightly towards him.

For a moment Tchish longed to clasp her round the waist

and pull her down by force, but the vision of her fat bloated limbs restrained him.

Anna Vassilievna remained standing for a moment and smoothed her hair; as she went out she said in a rather impudent tone :

“ Well, mind you get well soon. . . . I’ll look in again ! ”

CHAPTER LXVI

IT was one of the last dry autumn days of waning light, redolent of frost and snow. In the desolate gardens the wind bent the black bare trees and blew the yellow leaves on the paths into heaps. The mud in the streets froze during the night, and thin columns of dust flew and circled in the hard wheel-ruts which resounded under the feet like steel. Sometimes the sky darkened, lowering, and scarcely perceptible snowflakes began to shimmer in the air.

The little student sat at home on his bed, dully staring at one spot on the floor, where a bent hair-pin lay to which some hairs still clung.

Now he realized clearly that everything was over, and that the great splendid life of which he had dreamed so long and passionately had forsaken him for ever.

The end !

He could not understand how it had happened.

He had been drunk again, horribly and vilely drunk ; he had been reduced to the state of falling down in the street, singing and kissing police officers ; now he was overcome by the most terrible depression and the unendurable consciousness of his absolute loneliness.

Not one of those whom he had known and considered at least as human beings had stayed with him. Some horror had raced through the town and carried them all away with it, as though they had never existed. As in a mist he remembered the faces of Cornet Krause, Naumoff, Lisa, Michailov. . . . Only old Dr. Arnoldi, drunken and decaying, was left, murmuring rubbish to himself. " I have been dead a long time ! "

And all around there were nothing but townsfolk, shopkeepers, priests, officers, and clerks, who did their work, played cards, married, and begot children, that they in their turn should grow up and become shop-keepers, townsfolk, clerks and officers like themselves, performing their

duties, drinking, and multiplying without reason and without end.

Dr. Arnoldi was right : he had been dead a long time although he still went about and spoke. At least he recognized that he was dead, whereas thousands and thousands move about the globe, like worms on a carcase, and never know that they are walking corpses whom some one has let loose in the world in malicious irony till at last they are really shovelled into the grave.

And among these pale, dead creatures the little student Tchish moves and labours, unnecessarily, endlessly. He believes in something, suffers for something, and is full of zeal for the cause. . . . Besides, he believes even now. He does not himself know in what, but he believes ! Full of grief, full of tormenting agonies he believes without hope ! . . . At last he has been severed from the object of his belief, cast to the earth, and now sinks slowly deeper and deeper.

The end is inevitable, all in vain he has writhed on the brink of the chasm, never seeing that his efforts are aimless and ludicrous. Now he is tired, has ceased to struggle and sunk to the depths in this senseless stagnation, consisting of nothing but drinking, worthlessness, and a hateful liaison with a fat old stupid woman.

"How could it have happened ?" he asked himself for the hundredth time.

He had been lonely and had yearned for the smallest crumb of personal happiness, for some caress, for pity. No one had been with him, no one had bothered about him, but she seemed to be simple and kind.

When he awoke on the day after his drunken indisposition, he had sauntered aimlessly through the town. No one was to be seen, twilight lay over everything, the swamp, the dirty streets, the miserable hovels, the damp fences and market-gardens. He went past the club, and still he found nobody. Solitary and wretched, he called on Dr. Arnoldi ; and did not find him at home either. Then he met the same police officer with whom he had made friends when he was drunk.

Tchish pretended not to notice him, but the police-officer, who stood still, had begun to laugh and joke and at

last invited him to his house. All the time they both did their best to avoid the personal pronoun in their conversation. Tchish was in such a melancholy humour that he at length allowed the officer to take him home with him. There he again got drunk in the company of other intoxicated clerks. The latter laughed drowsily, made stupid jokes and low insinuations about his landlady, while the officer himself tapped him on the shoulder and called out : " What a swine you are ! . . ." At first Tchish felt deeply insulted, but the louder the roaring in his head, the more ready was he to think the clerks good chaps, the policeman a dear old fellow, and their obscene conversation humorous ; in the end he was talking in the same way, kissing them, singing and laughing. . . .

He went home late at night. His landlady had been asleep, but she got up to open the door for him. She had thrown a large shawl over her bare shoulders. Tchish began to joke with her, to make ambiguous remarks, and asked her to remove the shawl. The vodka, the proximity of the woman, flushed with sleep, her cries of alarm and short nervous laugh had risen to his head.

There had been a moment when the little student regained consciousness and had a clear vision of himself, insignificant, drunk, excited, with this common, fat, half-naked woman. But an indescribable despair and bitterness took possession of him.

" Oh, it's all the same ! " flashed through his mind.

And when the horrible, shameless struggle began again, all at once she was in his room. . . .

" How revolting ! " he thought in anguish.

The next morning he was afraid to leave his room, but she came in to him, brazen and unconstrained, with an open smile of desire. The maid was not in the house, her little son, a schoolboy, was doing his lessons in the next room. Tchish recollects, with a crushing sense of abhorrence, how she had rushed up, dishevelled, to the boy, who, finding it too dull by himself, had unexpectedly opened the door, and after pushing him back, had slammed it behind him.

Then, as a matter of course, there was quite a family dinner, at which she gave him the tenderest morsels, called

him Kirinsha, complained of her little son, who sat shame-faced with his nose in his plate, and begged Tchish to keep a tight hand over him.

After the meal the little student went to his room, locked the door, crawled on to a corner of the bed and sat there in dead, blunted apathy. The whole time he stared with insensate horror at the bent and dusty hair-pin which lay beside the bed.

Gradually the twilight deepened, shadows stole through the room, the red lines on the horizon, against which the outlines of the bare garden had stood out hard and black, faded.

Sluggishly and slowly his thoughts crept onwards, in his soul was nothing but deadly despondency.

"I believe, believe that life is beautiful and noble in itself, but not for me! . . . For me all is over: I shall never get away from here, I have neither the power nor the desire to struggle. I must sink lower and ever lower . . . if it is possible to sink lower than I have done! . . . Let others live, and be happy, let the far unknown regions of a free, human existence reveal themselves to them! I am lost! . . . My thoughts cease, my soul withers and degenerates! . . . It is not my fault; I have fought, believed, dreamed, have urged others to believe! . . . I was not strong enough. . . . But whose fault is it that strength was not given to me? . . . I have been cast down and cannot rise again, a poor unfortunate man, persecuted by Fate. . . . But from the loathsome swamp in which I perish, I will stretch out my hand to bless the happy ones of the future, who will not even know of my existence."

Time passed, darkness covered the earth, and Tchish still sat in his corner, without thinking, only feeling that he was sinking headlong into deadly, hopeless despair. The land-lady knocked several times and called out:

"Kyril Dmitrievitch! Kirinsha! . . . Open the door! . . . Why have you locked yourself in?"

Then the little student crept still further into the corner of the bed and answered:

"I don't feel quite well. . . . I'm going to sleep. . . ."

Night fell. All was dark in the room, the wind sighed outside, hard, dry snowflakes beat against the windows.

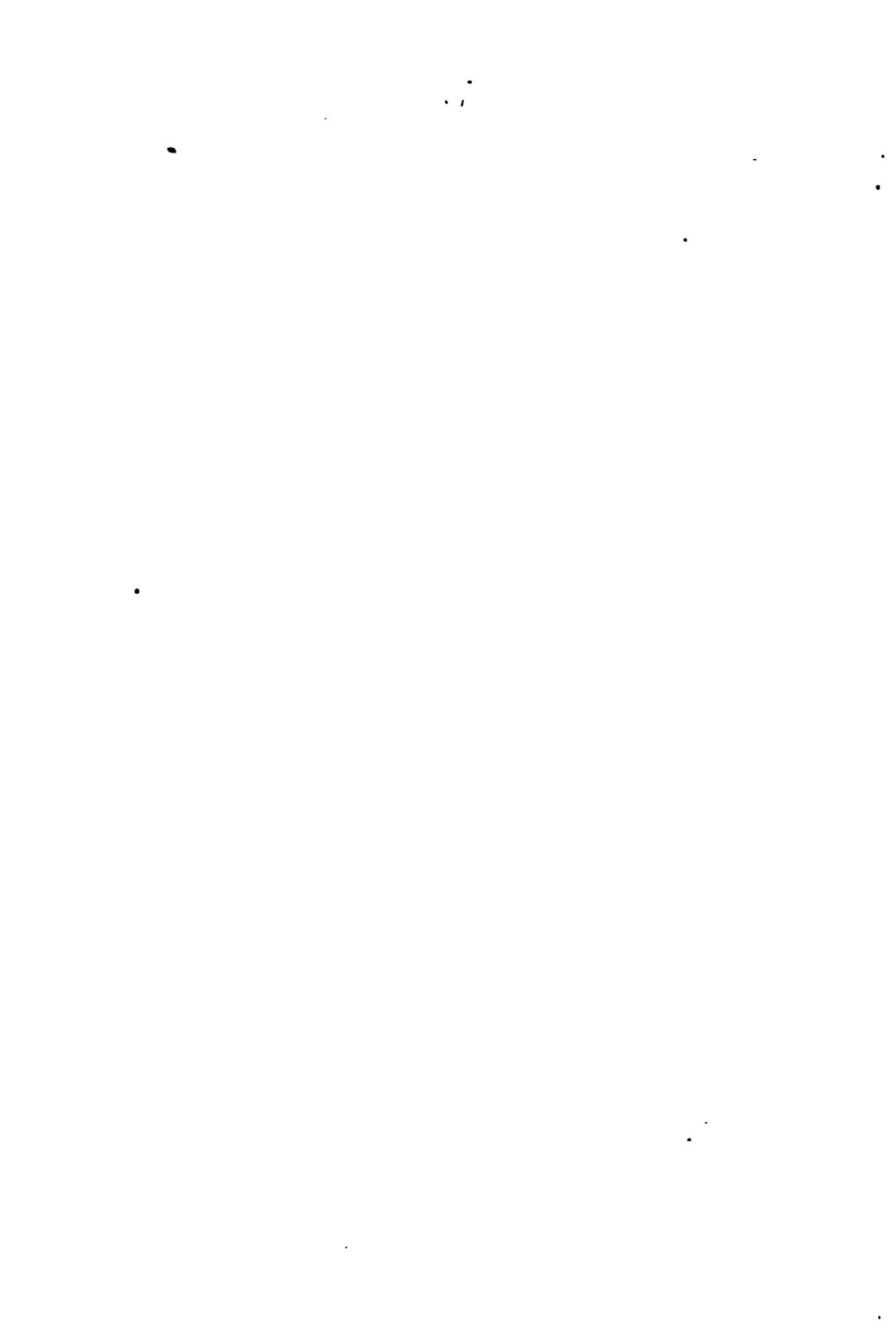
Towards morning the snow fell faster, the wind raged and the first winter snowstorm howled round the house.

Bluish light penetrated the room ; timidly, with pale eyes, it looked into every corner. Then the snow gradually ceased to fall, everything was covered ; smooth, white, and pure, the earth was wrapped in it. The trees stood motionless in the garden, little ridges of snow on every branch. And Tchish's room was equally still and cold. The bare walls, severe and empty, looked down on the anxious silence they enclosed.

The little student was hanging from a hook on the wall, next to his short overcoat. In front of him, on the floor, stood his goloshes, old and torn.

THE END





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